

Jesus' Glorious Image

Mark 9:1-13

Key Verse: 9:3

"His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them."

In this passage, Jesus encourages his disciples by revealing his glorious image to them. The word "image" is used a lot today. Someone said, "Image is everything." Presidential candidates are working hard to create a right image in the minds of voters. Athletes or movie stars who have a good public image make a lot of money from endorsements. There is power in image. So, many people try to create an image that is better than reality. This may be especially true of people who are dating. But Jesus is different. Jesus' true self was much greater than what people thought of him. Jesus rarely revealed his true glory. But in today's passage Jesus does so. It is to plant in his disciples his true image in glory. This would become their power source to take up their cross and follow him. May Jesus' glorious image be planted in our hearts today.

I. Jesus' promise to see the kingdom of God (1)

The disciples had just heard for the first time that Jesus would suffer, die and rise again. They had just heard that they must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him. This is the way to true and everlasting life. But it was not easy for them to accept. They had a conflict with Jesus. At the moment, the Christian life seemed like only suffering and loss. Nevertheless, we should appreciate Jesus' honesty. Many leaders promise their followers an easy road and many benefits and never talk about the downside of following them. The U.S. Army recruits soldiers with the motto, "An army of one." It makes army life sound awesome. It sounds like one U.S. soldier can defeat an entire enemy nation by himself. It stresses the individuality and freedom of each soldier. But in reality army life is hard beginning with basic training at the bottom of a strict chain of command. There is a real possibility of death. However, if the Army advertised, "Come, die for your country," who would join? So we can understand army recruiters. In contrast, Jesus was very clear that his disciples must be ready to give their lives for him and the gospel.

However, a Christian's life in this world is not just an ominous premonition of suffering and death. Look at verse 1. "And he said to them, 'I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.'" Jesus promised that they would see the kingdom of God. Jesus promised that they would taste the joy, peace and power of the kingdom of God while living in this world. In John 5:24, Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." The moment we believe in Jesus we have eternal life. There is no sting of death for us anymore. Assurance of eternal life gives us real peace. We can be free from the power of sin and death and live daily in the presence of God. We can see God ruling the world and participate in his reign. As Paul said, "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Ro 8:37). However, to some people, the

kingdom of God is like fire insurance. They study the Bible and go to church to insure that they will not go to hell when they die. In the meantime, their hearts are set on the things of the world and their daily life is marked by anxiety, fear and distress. This is not what Jesus wants for us. Jesus wants us to experience the kingdom of God while living in this real world and to be joyful and victorious. How did he help his disciples?

II. Jesus revealed his glorious image (2-4).

Jesus had given his disciples a promise to see the kingdom of God. However, the disciples were not rejoicing and happy. Rather, they were moping around. Perhaps Peter wondered if he had spent too much time away from his wife, straining their relationship. Perhaps James and John thought about their poor father's struggle to survive in the fishing business which they had abandoned to follow Jesus. Even Matthew may have thought that his tax booth wasn't that lonely after all. There was tension between Jesus and his disciples and no one was saying anything. We can imagine how Jesus might have felt. Jesus had given up the glory of heaven to come to earth as a man. Jesus knew that he was the only way for men to be saved from their sins and to have eternal life. But no one seemed to appreciate this. Jesus had sacrificed himself completely to heal the sick, drive out demons, and preach the good news. Yet many who received his help completely forgot what he had done. Once Jesus healed ten lepers; only one returned to give thanks. Moreover, the religious leaders became jealous and falsely accused Jesus. Now their conspiracy against Jesus was growing day by day. Most troubling to Jesus must have been the spiritual condition of his disciples. After hearing about his suffering, death and resurrection they became hard-hearted, and Peter even rebuked him. No one really understood Jesus. No one encouraged Jesus. What did Jesus do?

Look at verse 2. "After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them." We learn several things here.

First, Jesus is in very nature God. The word "transfigured" means that Jesus' appearance changed. Until now, Jesus had appeared like an ordinary man. Isaiah described the incarnate Jesus as follows: "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering" (Isa 53:2b-3). Jesus did not carry the trappings of a prince. Jesus looked very ordinary. Jesus took the form of a servant. Jesus had worked hard as a carpenter and had probably also cooked, washed dishes and done laundry. Jesus did not ask others to do menial labor; he did it himself. So people despised him. Yet Jesus did not retaliate. Jesus did not punish the irreverent by shocking them with bolts of lightning from his fingertips. As a servant, Jesus took up the pains and sorrows of mankind and bore them in our place. In the course of ministering to needy people he was drained. After exerting spiritual energy he was exhausted. He had been utterly rejected by various people; how painful rejection is! In his flesh, Jesus looked pathetic and weak. Yet as Jesus prayed on the mountain, something began to happen. His ordinary appearance began to transform into spiritual glory. The holiness and power of God began to emanate from his inner man and to transform his countenance. Jesus transcended his humanity and revealed his true inner nature as God.

Mark described Jesus' appearance by saying in verse 3, "His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them" (3). Jesus' appearance could not be described by ordinary language. Jesus' appearance was glorious beyond our understanding. Jesus became dazzling white. This sounds like a description of pure light. This is one of the ways the Bible describes God. 1 John 3:5b says, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." 1 Timothy 6:15b-16a says, "God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see." When Jesus spent time with God on the mountain, his original image as God was fully revealed. Jesus is in very nature God. Jesus is the Holy and Almighty God. Jesus' glorious and holy image is described in Revelation 1:14-16 as follows: "His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance." How glorious Jesus truly is!

Jesus revealed this glorious image to his disciples to plant it in their souls. His image of perfect holiness and mighty power could purge them of sinful desires and fill them with holy desires. His glorious image could eradicate fear and despair from their hearts and fill them with glorious hope and true courage. Jesus' glorious image could heal them from all the evil images of the world and make them strong in spirit. Later Peter wrote, "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" (2 Pet 1:16). John wrote, "We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14b). Through these men, Jesus changed the world with the gospel. Anyone who has Jesus' glorious image planted in their souls can be strong and courageous and do great things for God. On the other hand, evil images poison people's souls and rob them of strength and power. In our time there has been an explosion of images through various media and the internet. We must be careful about what images come into our hearts. We can be infected by bad images even though we never intended to. Then we lose strength and want to melt into the easygoing culture. At such times, we must ask Jesus to come into our hearts and shine his glorious image in us. Jesus can make us strong and powerful. We can do all our homework, teach the Bible to others, and sing and dance with great joy. Jesus' glorious image can empower us to conquer the world with the gospel.

Second, Elijah and Moses talked with Jesus (4). Look at verse 4. "And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus." Elijah was the representative of the prophets. He had lived in the time of the evil King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, more than 700 years before Jesus. His message of repentance was clear and powerful, like thunder. One time God answered his prayer by sending fire from heaven. Yet Elijah had suffered much and he once prayed to God to take his life. Moses was the lawgiver. He lived some 1,300 years before Jesus. God did mighty acts through him and used him to deliver his people from bondage in Egypt. God used him to shepherd his people in the wilderness. Yet, Moses too had suffered much due to rebellion and failures. Yet now

Elijah and Moses appear in glory with Jesus. The life of suffering for mission ennobled them and led into the glory of heaven.

What did Elijah and Moses talk with Jesus about? Luke 9:31 tells us that they spoke about Jesus' departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Jesus' imminent death on the cross would fulfill both the Law and the Prophets. It was the climax of God's redemptive history. Jesus knew this very well. But as a human being, Jesus did not want to suffer and be rejected. As Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane shows, he did not want to die. Jesus needed some encouragement. At that time, Jesus did not accept Peter's counsel that he should take the easy way. Jesus went to God in prayer and met Elijah and Moses on the mountain. Jesus received the spiritual encouragement from God to fulfill his mission through his death on the cross. When we are in need of counseling, we should go to God through the word of God. We must shun the appealing words of easygoing people who speak according to the sinful nature.

III. Listen to him (5-13).

Look at verses 5-6. "Peter said to Jesus, '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.' (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)" It is interesting that Peter did not know what to say; yet he spoke up anyway. And what he said revealed his true inner condition. Peter said, "It is good for us to be here." What Peter really wanted was to stay on the mountain with Jesus, Elijah and Moses. Peter was not listening carefully to their words, for they were speaking about Jesus' departure. Jesus had to go down the mountain, travel to Jerusalem and go to the cross. But Peter just wanted to stay on the mountain permanently. We see in Peter the natural man's tendency to enjoy glory and honor to the maximum without any suffering. Peter's words here stem from the same inner desire that led him to rebuke Jesus in chapter 8. Mankind's sinful desire to enjoy ease and glory without suffering is strong. This time God himself answers Peter.

Look at verse 7. "Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!'" To any Jewish young man, the imagery here would be unmistakable (Ex 19:9). It was God's voice speaking to them.

What then did God say to Peter, James and John? First of all, God said, "This is my Son." God identified Jesus as the very Son of God. As the Son of God he has the right to rule, he has the right to judge all mankind, and he is the source of life. Jesus was not just another Rabbi; Jesus was the very Son of God and he taught the truth of God and the way of God. In addition, God said, "whom I love." God declared his love for Jesus. God's love is divine love. Jesus had already said that he must suffer much, be rejected and be killed, then rise again. It was a painful and difficult mission that he had received from God. God gave such a mission to the one he loved most. Sometimes we think that having a hard mission and many sufferings is a sign of disfavor by God. However, the opposite is true. God gives suffering and hard mission to those he really loves.

Finally, God said, "Listen to him!" It meant that the disciples needed to accept the message of suffering, death and resurrection even though they didn't like it. People usually listen to what they like and ignore what they don't like. But God's people must be different. God's people must listen to God even when they don't like it. We must accept the message of the cross even when we really don't like it.

Look at verse 8. "Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus." Though we need to see Jesus in glory on the mountain, most of our Christian life is lived on the plain. There Jesus is with us in hidden glory, sharing the ordinary moments of everyday life. Only the incarnate Jesus is with us all the time. Our Christian life is happy when we learn to fellowship with him in the ordinary events of life.

As they were going down the mountain, Jesus gave orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. Remarkably they discussed what "rising from the dead meant." However, they also revealed again that they did not want to accept the message of suffering and death, appealing to the messages of the teachers of the law. Jesus told them, "Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected?" (12b) Jesus again taught that he must suffer and die. Though the disciples seemed to be listening better, they were still seeking a way of ease and glory without suffering.

In this passage Jesus revealed his glorious image to his disciples and us to plant it in our hearts. Let's accept this glorious image. Then all the evil images flee from our hearts. We can be powerful people of God. Let's pray that Jesus' glorious image may fill the hearts of young people in our nation until they burn with desire to serve God as missionaries and Bible teachers. May God richly bless you.