



Speaker:
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Jesus Only

◀ Series: The Gospel of Mark • 29 of 29

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Today we're in Mark's 9th chapter. And we're picking up where we left off last week—v 2.

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Recently, we heard an important confession from the mouth of Peter. His acknowledgement that Jesus is the Christ was one element of the revealing of the kingdom of God. Straight after this, Jesus begins to talk about his suffering and death. Today, with this even greater event, we see Jesus likewise immediately following it up with talk of his death and resurrection. The disciples needed to understand the centrality of the cross in the work of the Messiah.

In the episode we're considering today, Jesus takes three of his disciples with him up a mountain. This wouldn't be the first time Jesus had chosen Peter, James and John with him and left the other disciples behind. We can only guess why Jesus singled out three or four disciples out of the twelve, but it wouldn't be unfair to say they this was his inner circle.

Interestingly, Peter mentions the transfiguration episode in one of his letters. **2 Peter 1:16–18** For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. It must have been a real blessing for Peter to be able to recall such a wonderful event, seeing Jesus in his glory-light.

Jesus goes up a mountain again. Mountains feature prominently throughout scripture, often associated with some revelation from God.

It's not easy to work out why Luke included the detail of the six-day wait before the group went up the mountain. The six days is one element of Moses' meeting with God on Sinai. **Exodus 24:15–16** And Moses went up into the mount, and a cloud covered the mount. And the glory of the LORD abode upon mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud. So in both accounts we have a high mountain, a six-day period, and a revealing of God.

This transfiguration then. The word just means "changed". Jesus's face changed from normal to a shining whiteness. This is again reminiscent of Moses' mountain

experience. Exodus 34:29–30 And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of Testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him.

We're used to Jesus telling people not to say anything about a certain healing or other miracle. He does the same here, but there's a difference. There's a condition attached to this one. He tells them not to say anything *until he rises from the dead*. So he *does want* his words and his works broadcast when he's gone, but why not now? Likely because such a dramatic exhibition of his divinity would lead to a massive uprising of the Jews.

This event is curious and unique. It tells us lots but also creates just as many questions. Was this a vision? If not, how is it these two men could be there at all? How on earth did the disciples recognise them? One commentator puts it like this: "Luke also says the disciples awoke from sleep (Lk. 9:32). Was the rest of the story some visionary and auditory perception, given by God and shared by all three, sparked off by the real change in Jesus' appearance on the one hand and leading to Peter's understandable but inappropriate down-to-earth suggestion on the other? The truth is that we cannot know what happened apart from these accounts." But that's okay, because we need to see the *meaning* of the transfiguration was rather than trying to get to the bottom of all its details.

The disciples didn't entirely understand what the transfiguration was about. And the modern reader may well wonder if there was more to it. So today, I'm going to offer a few suggestions for the purpose of the transfiguration.

It was about his glory

As well as the change in Jesus's appearance, there was this cloud. Clouds are frequently associated with the presence and power of God. We came across a few references in Revelation you might recall. And here was God making his presence known as he endorses the grand claims of this man Jesus.

God makes this announcement. We heard something similar at Jesus's baptism. The details may be a little different, but the meaning is the same: **God is making it clear this man is his beloved Son and the anointed one**. He therefore directs their hearers to hear Jesus; to accept his teaching is from heaven itself.

And this endorsement from God was about **Jesus only**. He doesn't mention Moses or Elijah, despite them being such important figures in the history of Israel. He identifies *Jesus* as the son of God and no one else.

It's commonly believed Moses and Elijah here represent the law and the prophets, respectively. Certainly, Jesus is the one spoken of in the Law of Moses and in the sayings of the prophets, of which class Elijah was a member.

But it's unlikely this is what we're to conclude from the appearance of these individuals in particular. The law came by Moses, yes, but he was also a prophet. Listen to this

in Deuteronomy 18:18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And although Elijah was a prophet, he also had associations with Sinai. 1 Kings 19:8 And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God. (Mount Horeb was another name for Sinai.) We'll have a look in a moment at the most likely reason these two were chosen to be part of the event.

When Peter saw these two, he made this rather strange suggestion. He offers the services of himself and the other two disciples in building little homes for the three figures: Elijah, Moses and Jesus. One of the problems with his suggestion is it implies an equality between the three people.

All followers of Jesus Christ need to understand his superiority to all others. These two witnesses were there one minute then they disappeared the next. Their work was done. **The disciples were left with Jesus only.** No matter how highly they regarded these great men of old, Jesus was now God's authorised ruler and spokesman. He alone is to receive all the honour and glory. And friends, you and I can contribute to this in the way we esteem Jesus in our hearts.

It was about his kingdom

You might remember last week. How our reading finished on the first verse of this ninth chapter. The Bible, as originally given, had no chapters or verse numbers. It's interesting that those who gave us the chapter divisions we have today decided to put Jesus statement from verse one in at the beginning of a new chapter. And this has led some people to believe Jesus's prediction about the kingdom of God coming with power referred to the transfiguration.

It's not the whole picture, but it's an important part of it. The incident is one link in a chain of occurrences that manifest the kingdom of God to this world. The disciples are truly witnessing the kingdom coming.

I said we'd look at the likely reason for these two figures in particular to be chosen to make an appearance. Well, it's no coincidence **these two Old Testament characters are associated with the coming of the Messianic Age.** The age of the Kingdom. The age of *the gospel of the Kingdom.*

This hope was at the heart of Jewish religion. At the very end of the whole of the Old Testament are the words of Malachi. Malachi 4:4–5 Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD... The disciples, being Jewish, would appreciate the importance of these two Old Testament figures, and I'm sure some of them thought this was a sign of the end.

The only thing this was the end of was the Jews' corrupt religion! But it's the start of something big. **God was introducing a new and better covenant promise to this world.** A promised declaring all who made their way to the feet of Jesus in repentance would receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Salvation by the grace of God alone, through faith in Jesus Christ alone, was to be preached throughout the world. The favour of God, up till now restricted to a tiny geographical region of the world, was about to go global. No nation, no people group, no language, would remain unaffected by this spread of the powerful message of the gospel.

If you're fascinated by outer space as I am, you may have seen some video footage from the International Space Station. We're very privileged when you think about it. It's only in the past half century man's been able to see planet Earth from space. And any rational creature will marvel at both the beauty of the planet and the brilliance of its designer.

It's fascinating to watch footage of our planet as each area enters the great shadow of night. As the Earth rotates, you can see the cities of the Earth enter the darkness. And suddenly you see all the lights being switched on. And as all the lights in the streets and in the houses and factories get switched on at roughly the same time, the light can be seen from space.

When I considered the brightness of Jesus's countenance here, I imagined it like a light about to break out all over the world. And each new convert, as it were, "catches" this light. And so these lights come on all the time. One in South America. a few minutes later, another in China. Then one in Spain, and Canada, and Nigeria... And they're coming on all over the world every day, like beacons on the top of a hill, showing to all who will see the gradual extension of God marvellous kingdom.

It was about his suffering

It's difficult to get to the bottom of what exactly the disciples were thinking. It was probably confusion, mostly. They knew about the promise of Elijah's return before Messiah comes. Well they've just seen him...and now he's vanished! Jesus had told them ages ago the coming of Elijah referred to John the Baptist. He says it again now.

I don't think verses 12 and 13 are particularly easy to understand. In a nutshell, Jesus is saying *Elijah has already come*, in the form of John the Baptist; and he, Jesus, will likewise suffer at the hands of the authorities.

If you recall the episode in the Old Testament, you'll remember Jezebel making threats about Elijah. She was saying she'd have him killed within 24-hours. That didn't happen. We should instead look for a fulfilment in the life of John the Baptist. There's an interesting parallel between the two. John was killed at the instigation of a thoroughly wicked woman who manipulated a weak-minded king, and Elisha had been persecuted by a similar woman who also manipulated a king. Going back a few weeks, we saw Herodias being the cause of John the Baptist's death. The commentator Swete says John the Baptist "found his Jezebel in Herodias".

So Jesus uses the fate of John the Baptist to show how he would likewise suffer. The Jewish disciples would have had their own fantasies about the coming of Elijah then the Messiah, and Jesus here completely destroys any such misconceptions. How many times does he have to say it? **Suffering is at the very core of his purpose in their world.**

I don't want to criticize Peter for what he said. True, sometimes we want to just say to Peter, *Can you please just not speak? I know it's a strange concept to you, but just try not speaking for a change!* But the fact he just woke up, and his shock at the sight of the scene in front of them, no doubt contributed to some confusion. It says in the passage that they were scared.

But as we witness Peter's failings recorded for us, I think it's better for us to assume we'd have done no better had we been there. What's more, there may have been rational thinking behind Peter's suggestion. The Hebrews had a special week of remembrance called the Feast of Tabernacles. They'd spend the week in temporary shelters—just tents, really. It was so they could remind themselves of the great exodus from Egypt when they lived as nomads before settling in Canaan.

Perhaps the transfiguration took place at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. But in any case, one old prophecy linked the coming of the Kingdom with the Feast of Tabernacles. **Zechariah 14:16** *And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.* Peter may have thought it was appropriate to suggest building three tabernacles as part of the fulfilment of that prophecy.

But whether he knew it or not, Peter was again undermining God's purpose. It wasn't the time to be acting out end time events when Jesus had not yet suffered. **Jesus had made it clear to him and the others that his suffering and death must come before his glorification**, and so Peter had no excuse for making the suggestion he did.

One of the prime purposes for the transfiguration was to get the disciples used to the idea of the cross. The offence they felt when they heard Jesus talk about the necessity of his suffering needed to be eradicated. The offence of the cross needed to be removed from their thinking. The transfiguration was to so impress them with the reality of his glory that their faith wouldn't be undermined when they witnessed his coming suffering and death.

It was about his resurrection

Remember: Jesus told the disciples to wait until he had been raised from the dead. Then they could broadcast all they wanted about him.

The disciples knew what the word "resurrection" meant. The problem was their religion used it only to describe the end-time resurrection of the saints. For Jesus to be resurrected meant he had to first die, and this is what caused them so much trouble.

What they should have seen in this transfiguration was a token of the coming resurrection of Jesus and his ascension to heaven. They needed to grasp the reality that although their

master and messiah was to die, it would be a voluntary act, and he would rise again from the dead.

And let's not forget the resurrection of Jesus was the great example of the phenomenon that would affect the whole of mankind. When he returns, there'll be a resurrection of all the dead people from throughout history. *All* will be resurrected. For some, it will be so they can be judged and damned. For others, it will be so they can be judged and given immortality.

But when the believer talks about the resurrection of the body, more often than not what they mean is the resurrection of the just—the raising of God's elect. The Bible describes our resurrection as our great hope. The idea of a resurrection to life wasn't unknown in the Old Testament, but it wasn't a fully formed doctrine. Later, one sect of the Jews, the Sadducees, would deny the idea altogether. *When you're dead, you're dead*, they insisted.

When you recall the Feast of Tabernacles was to remind the people about the temporary existence in the wilderness, it'll be easy to make the connection with our existence in the wilderness of this world. The Apostle Paul describes the resurrection as the gift of *new tabernacles*. We get new bodies to live in!

So, friends, we should never forget that our state now is a temporary one. We can enjoy life, and take all reasonable steps to preserve it, but not to the extent we forget that we don't belong here. When we enter our glorious new environment, we'll say like Peter, *It's good to be here!*

It was about “Jesus only”

The transfiguration ended very abruptly. The brightness had gone. The cloud had gone. The witnesses had gone. And in a way the God the Father had gone, stepping back, having presented his Son as the one who would have the pre-eminence.

In the whole passage we read today, it's these two words that stood out for me most spectacularly. “**Jesus only**”. The participants had gone, the visual spectacle had ended, and the disciples saw no one but *Jesus only*.

We also hope that *we* see Jesus only. By this, I mean he's the one to be in all our preaching and witness. The apostle makes this very clear in **1 Corinthians 2:2 For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified**. And bound to his crucifixion is his resurrection. That he died and rose again is the focal point of our preaching and our evangelism. Hurtado says, “intelligent talk of the glory of Jesus cannot be done apart from emphasis upon his death and resurrection, and that any Christian preaching and devotion that is not centred on the meaning of these events is shallow and confused.”

When I preach, this is my aim. I'll preach from different books of the Bible. I may even preach about particular topics. But I endeavour every week to place Jesus Christ at the heart of my message. And since I can't come up with language good enough to give Jesus the honour that's due him, I go and pray to our Father in heaven for help. I pray for *you*. I ask God to see to it that, when my preaching is over, in their hearts you might see **none but**

Jesus only. As you listen to me, I want me to decrease and Jesus Christ to increase in the honour and praise coming from your hearts.

I heard a preacher once talk about a Christian he knew. He spoke highly of him, at one point referring to his strong trinitarian beliefs. *A real trinitarian*, he said. *Not one of these people who go round wearing little badges saying, "Jesus only"*. This preaches seem to think using the phrase "Jesus only" undermines the doctrine of the Trinity. But not only is the phrase in front of us in the scriptures themselves, we can see elsewhere in the Bible Jesus's role within the Trinity is to be the "frontman", as it were. We trust in the death of *Jesus Christ*, not the death of the Father. We're said to be joint heirs with *Christ*, not joint heirs with the Holy Spirit. So there's nothing wrong with this phrase, *Jesus only*.

Jesus features in the Old Testament and is described as being all light. **Psalm 104:2** *Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: Who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain...* Now since Jesus is the creator, then it's he who's being referred to as being covered in light. He *is* light.

As I was thinking about Jesus being light as indicated by this transfiguration, I thought about a prism. Likely you know, light enters a prism and is broken up into its separate colours. It's as if Jesus is the white light and as he adds people to his giant congregation, all different colours are produced. And as he builds his church, we see different "colours" of characters emerge. We have our own identities.

But our aim is to become like him. We don't want to keep this mixture of Christlikeness and foolishness. We want to become more and more like him. **Romans 12:2** *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed [TRANSFIGURED] by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* We're to be *transfigured*. Not in that visual way that we looked at today, but *inwardly*. We're to change our habits, our language, our affections, our thinking...all to be more like our saviour.

May the Lord bless you, even as you listen now, that you might be left with a high view of the redeemer. To come away from this meeting thinking of **Jesus Only**.

Amen.