

Sermon 2-11-2018
Transfiguration – Mark 9
By
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The final Sunday before the beginning of Lent is the day that we remember the Transfiguration, when Jesus became dazzling white before his disciples. We'll get to the story in a little bit, but we should have some context first.

Psalm 50:1-6

When the Israelites thought about the presence of God, this is the sort of language that they used.

*****read*****

These are big images. His voice can reach to the ends of the earth. God shines. He brings a devouring fire. He calls not just the earth, but the heavens too. The vision of God here is grandiose, which is not uncommon in the Scriptures. The Old Testament especially is filled with these images of God's glory. These were definitely in the minds of the disciples as they saw this scene unfold before them.

Mark 9:2-9

There's one extra verse I want to give you as we go into the story of the Transfiguration. I want to read the first verse of chapter 9 to you. (read 9:1) That's a key detail. Mark puts that right before this story for a

reason, well, actually, two reasons. Let's get to the *first one*.

*****read*****

The images you're getting here sure sound like Psalm 50, don't they? God shines forth, right? His voice reaches so far that Moses and Elijah come down to talk with Jesus. The cloud surrounds them. These are the declarations that God is here. This rabbi that you follow, disciples, is not just any ordinary rabbi. He is Lord of heaven and earth. He is the summation of the Law and the Prophets. He is everything you know of God in one package. Is this what Jesus meant about the kingdom of God coming with power? Is this what we're going to experience always? That's the purpose behind Peter's babbling about shelters. Let's stay here forever!

But if you think we're going to experience this forever, let's look at the end of the passage. "until the Son of Man had risen from the dead." When you see that sentence, you might focus on the word "risen". I'm going to focus on the word "dead". Because Mark has set us up for a switch. Mark put that first verse in there to make us think that this was the place of glory, this mountaintop. He wants us to think the shiny stuff is the glory. But look back at that verse before the story begins: "before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power." Power and glory usually go together. And these glorious images that we have seen

in the Psalm and in the Transfiguration conjure up images of power. Jesus can do this; he is powerful; he is glorious! But those times are few and far between. In fact, for most of Jesus' life, he sure doesn't look like this. What does this tell us?

Our definition of glory is wrong.

Jesus is always glorious, right? He is always powerful? Then we need to be looking in different places for

glory. Our definition is often the big, the flashy, the influential, the powerful. And we get attracted by that.

We think that those are the signs of blessing by God.

We think that being successful or rich or having second homes or good family lives or lots of people in our congregation are all the outgrowths of God's work in our lives. And some of those things can be. But your best life now puts your eyes in the wrong place. The evil one loves to masquerade as an angel of light.

When things are going well in your life, it means absolutely nothing about the state of your faith, soul, or God's care for you. It can merely mean things are going well. If you read through the Scriptures, there are also many stories of those who seem to think things are going well, and they're going to go well for a long time, and disaster strikes, and they have nothing. Our sense of glory is fleeting.

So what is God's definition of glory? What does Jesus mean when he talks about the kingdom of God coming

in power? That's when we get to that word "dead". This is where we move from a theology of glory to a theology of the cross. Paul outlines this in 2 Corinthians today.

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:6

Paul mentions a *veil* that Moses would wear. This is the veil he would wear when he came back down off the mountain from seeing God. Watch how he uses the image.

*****read*****

Here's the key phrase for today: seeing the end of what was passing away. The glory of God that reflected onto Moses as he was receiving the Ten Commandments was passing away from his human image. It's the same thing that happens to glory that we see in this world: it fades. Championship banners fade. Houses break down. Bodies break down. Our wills turn away from God, just as they always do. It is why any military victories or dominance or earthly kingdoms that the disciples might have been expecting were not how God was planning on saving his people. When we gaze on the face of Christ, we are gazing at the face of the *crucified one*. That is the glory that the disciples cannot see or even fathom. That is the glory that *we* don't see or fathom. God's greatest victory is at his seeming defeat. God's greatest power is demonstrated in his greatest weakness. God's new life is proclaimed in his death. That is the kingdom of God

coming in power. It is not our kind of power; it is God's. And God uses his power to deliver those who believe in the name of Jesus Christ to eternal life, beyond any glory of this earth. And we can know that this one who hangs on the cross is God, because he revealed himself to be so, in his glorious appearing. And he uses his glory, for us, on the cross. Let us go with him. AMEN.