

Transfiguration of Christ

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Sermon prepared for **12 March 2006**,
eighth sermon.¹

Reading: **Mark 9: 2-10**

Theme: *"Christ, the Son of God, Chooses to Die at Calvary"*

Introduction

This passage is one of the most amazing and puzzling passages in the Gospels. What does it mean and what is its relevance for Lent and Easter? We will conduct this sermon as an interactive Bible Study¹.

Reading

- *Read the Mark passage together.*
- Ensure they are sitting in 2s or 3s

Comparison of Versions

- *Read and compare the three versions of the story.*
 - *Underline phrases that are unique to one story.*
- Review their findings.

Context

- This reading is part of the Lent cycle – thus part of preparation for Christ's passion.
- In chapter 11, Christ enters Jerusalem – Palm Sunday.
- So we must understand its meaning within its context.
- Mark 9:2 links the Transfiguration with the immediately preceding material.
 - Luke 9:28 makes it even more explicit "after Jesus said this".
- *Read Mark 8: 27-38.*
- *Identify two main discussions that set the immediate context for the Transfiguration.*
- 1) Peter acknowledges the Jesus is the Christ/Messiah (8:29).
 - Jesus tells him to keep it a secret.
- 2) Jesus predicts that he will suffer, die then rise from the dead (8:31).
 - Peter protests.
 - *Why does Peter protest?*
 - He cannot reconcile the 'Messiah' with the 'suffering servant'.
 - Jesus rebukes him, saying he is thinking in human terms, not as God thinks.
 - Jesus tells people they must follow him in suffering and death.
 - He comments on people being ashamed of him – Peter?

Perspective

- The Transfiguration was not merely for Jesus, but also (even primarily) for the disciples' benefit.
- *Why do I say that? Circle the words/phrases that indicate that the event was for the benefit of the disciples.*
- Review their findings.

¹ This sermon was conducted as a Bible study, with a worksheet that congregants completed during the sermon, which was interactive. It was quite long – 30 minutes!

Exegesis

- Let's move quickly through six motifs that appear in the text. Make notes on them in the 'Notes' column.
- *Why up a high mountain?*
 - To pray – isolation.
 - Link with Moses meeting God on Mt Sinai (Exodus 24)
 - Link with Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac on a mountain, near Calvary (Gen 22:2).
 - Place where people meet God.
- *Who else had a face that shone like the sun?*
 - Moses after he descended from meeting God on Mt Sinai (Exodus 34:29).
 - He was reflecting the glory of God.
 - Jesus in Revelation 1:16
 - The post-resurrection Son of God, in all his glory.
- *Why Moses and Elijah?*
 - Moses led the deliverance/exodus of Israel, as Christ will lead the deliverance of humanity.
 - Elijah is also the one who prepares the way for the Messiah (Mal 4:5).
- *What did they talk about?*
 - The departure of Jesus, which he was about to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem.
 - 'Departure' is *exodus* in Greek. Can be translated 'death'. Can refer to the culmination of all his work on earth.
- *What is the meaning of the cloud?*
 - God often appears to people in or as a cloud (Exodus 24:16).
 - The cloud both conceals and reveals God.
 - When Christ comes again, he will appear on the clouds (Mark 13:26).
- *What is the meaning of "This is my Son, whom I love"?*
 - Refers back to Jesus' baptism – "You are my Son, whom I love" (Mark 1:11)
 - There it was addressed to Christ, now to the disciples.
 - Also harks back to Abraham and Isaac (Gen 22:2)
 - The Greek (LXX) same as in Mark 9:7.
 - God implies that both are only sons, beloved.
 - Both will be sacrificed for the good of humanity, part of redemption.

Interpretation

- *Go back, read what you have written, and reflect on what it all means to the disciples and to us.*
- Peter and the disciples are grappling with who Jesus is, and with the incongruence of him being the Christ and him suffering/dying.
- Jesus therefore chooses to reveal something of himself to them, to help them make sense of the incongruence and to be able to witness to his Truth later.
- The mountain, the transfiguration, the presence of Moses, the cloud – all serve to make the disciples think about God’s revelation of himself to Moses on Mt Sinai (Ex 24) and of God’s covenant with Israel.
- God’s voice from the cloud affirms that God is present and in control; that Christ is not powerless and forsaken by God. But God also implies that a sacrifice is coming, like Isaac. He ratifies what Christ had said in Mark 8, by saying “Listen to him”.
- The presence of Elijah and the discussion on the exodus help the disciples understand that Christ is on a journey to Jerusalem and that he will choose to lay down his life.
- It is thus impossible to believe that this glorious Son of God could be overpowered and murdered by mere humans. Thus, everything that will happen in Jerusalem is God-ordained.
- And this is the crux of this message – that Christ chose to die – he knowingly emptied himself of his glory and chose the path of suffering and death for us.
- As we think about Christ’s passion and death, we emphasise his humanity – his death – and rightly so.
- But, we must bear in the back of our minds – like a secret to be revealed only after the fact – that this is the path he chose and that it is part of God’s plan for the redemption of humanity.

Application

- What does this mean for us? At least two things.
- Firstly, I think this story emphasises the discrepancy between what appears to be and what actually is. It appeared that Jesus was overpowered and that he lost the battle. But actually, this was all part of His plan.
- In our lives, we sometimes go through bad times, times when it feels that God is absent and out of control – this is how it appears to us. But it is in these very times that we need to remember that actually God is there, working out His purposes in the background.
- In a way, this passage is a lesson in God’s providence – that he is always in control, that nothing happens by accident, that He brings meaning into every situation. Our job is to search for God in these situations. We can pray that the situation be transfigured – that we catch a glimpse of Jesus glorified in the midst of the difficulty we are going through.
- Secondly, we can experience this transfiguration of Christ every Sunday – in the Eucharist
 - The wafer and wine become transfigured:
 - Spiritually, they become Christ’s body and blood.
 - They are imbued with the glory of God.
 - Like Peter, James and John, we become witnesses to the glorious Son of God who chose to be sacrificed for our salvation.
- And what can we do in response to all this?
 - WORSHIP!

ⁱ I want to engage people in investigating the Scriptures. This passage, in particular, is quite enigmatic, so I hope to get people feeling curious and participating in the process of interrogating the text and seeking God’s teaching.

The Transfiguration of Christ

Context:

Matthew 17: 1-9	Mark 9: 2-9	Luke 9: 28-36	Notes
¹ After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.	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.	²⁸ About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray.	
² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.	³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.	²⁹ As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.	
³ Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.	⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.	³⁰ Two men, Moses and Elijah, ³¹ appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. ³² Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him.	
⁴ Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."	⁵ 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." ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)	³³ As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, 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 he was saying.)	
⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"	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!"	³⁴ While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."	
⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." ⁸ When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.	⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.	^{36a} When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone.	
⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."	⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.	^{36b} The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen.	

Meaning: