

“The Transfiguration – Part 1”
Mark 9:1-8
(Preached at Trinity, June 6, 2012)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. This amazing event known as the Transfiguration is found in all three synoptic gospels. Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36, Matthew 17:1-9
 2. It was a glorious display of His glory. His disciples were left speechless and stunned. In Matthew’s account we read:
Matthew 17:6 NAS - "And when the disciples heard *this*, they fell on their faces and were much afraid."
In **Verse 6** of our text in **Mark** we read
Mark 9:6 NAU - "For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified."
 3. It was also a glorious display of God’s sovereign power. He chose to reveal this glory by His condescending grace. And He revealed His glory to whom He chose.
 4. Before we deal with the meaning of the Transfiguration itself, there are several minor points we need to deal with.
Tonight I simply want to set before you some questions raised, some issues to resolve, and some thoughts to meditate upon.
- I. First of all, we need to consider some of the many questions that have been raised regarding this passage.
- A. The question regarding the number of days in **Verse 2**
 1. Some would claim Luke’s statement is a contradiction:
Luke 9:28 – “And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings,”
Matthew and Mark’s state that it was after 6 days.
 2. Numbers are always a difficulty in Scripture. Not contradictions, but the way we use numbers is often imprecise or given with a particular emphasis.
 - a. Pastor Rob sometimes tells us to turn back “a couple pages” in our hymnal when it may actually be 8-10 pages. He is using the word “couple” to describe a small number.
 - b. I have a five gallon bucket that I use to change the water in my aquarium. I might say to someone:
“It is a bucket that holds 5 gallons of water,” describing the full capacity of the bucket.
But I might only drain 3 gallons each time I change the water so I might say,
“It is a bucket that holds 3 gallons of water,” describing the actual amount placed in the bucket.
 - c. We see this with the description of the huge bronze basin placed outside Solomon’s Temple.

1 Kings 7:26 NAS - "And it was a handbreadth thick, and its brim was made like the brim of a cup, as a lily blossom; it could hold two thousand baths."

2 Chronicles 4:5 KJV - "And the thickness of it was an handbreadth, and the brim of it like the work of the brim of a cup, with flowers of lilies; *and* it received and held three thousand baths."

If it were filled to the brim, it would hold 3000 baths, but ordinarily there were only 2000 baths in it

3. Luke may have used the traditional method of counting each part of the day as a whole.
Matthew and Mark counted the actual days while Luke counted each part of a day as a full day.
Some believe the transfiguration actually took place at night.
Luke 9:32 NAS - "Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men standing with Him."
 4. In addition, Luke was not intending to be precise: adding "*about eight days*"
 5. We should not be disturbed by "so called" discrepancies. Rather, we should rest with confidence in the Bible's infallibility and know that there is always an explanation.
- B. Why were only Peter, James, and John allowed to witness this event and not the other Apostles?
1. These three were also given distinction at other times
 - a. They alone were allowed to witness the resurrection of Jairus' daughter.
Mark 5:37 NAU - "And He allowed no one to accompany Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James."
 - b. They were prominent in the discussion of the destruction of the Temple at the Olivet discourse.
Mark 13:3 NAU - "As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately,"
 - c. They alone were present on Gethsemane.
Mark 14:32-33 NAU - "They came to a place named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here until I have prayed." ³³ And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled."
 2. These three had certain distinctions that distinguished them from the rest of the group
 - a. Peter was most often seen as the spokesman and leader of the group

- b. John was the disciple with a special spiritual affinity with Jesus
John 19:26-27 NAU - "When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" ²⁷ Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" From that hour the disciple took her into his own *household*."
- At least four other times John is described as the disciple whom Jesus loved.
 - John sat at the position closest to Jesus
John 13:23 NAU - "There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved."
- c. James was the first of the Twelve to give his life for the gospel and thus the first to enter into glory.
- d. It is not uncommon in any group for there to be an "inner circle." This is also true with church congregations. There are some who are more prominent. This is most often due to their great energy and labors that benefit the church. A pastor spends much time with the weak and unfaithful, but when he needs counsel he turns to those who have proven faithful.
3. Beyond this the answer has not been revealed
- a. But we need to understand that God doesn't have to fit into the mold many try to force upon Him today. Many feel that in order for God to be just He must treat all men absolutely equal. They have this egalitarian idea of fairness.
- b. God doesn't have to treat all men equally in order to treat all men justly. God has chosen His elect unto salvation. That is mercy. He has chosen to leave the remaining to perish in their sin. That is justice.
- c. Jesus chose particular men to serve as His Apostles and He chose 3 from among them to serve in His inner circle.
- d. Matthew Henry: "As there are distinguishing favours which are given to disciples and not to the world, so there are to some disciples and not to others. All the saints are a people *near to Christ*, but some lie in his bosom."
- D. **Verse 3** – How did the disciples recognize Moses and Elijah?
1. Some think their appearance had been transmitted by oral tradition
 2. Perhaps they were told or perhaps it was gathered by listening to the conversation with our Lord as they addressed one another by name.
 3. Some suppose it might have been by divine revelation
 4. Some suppose that perhaps Elijah arrived in a chariot of fire and Moses was holding the tablets of the Law – really stretching the bounds of the text.
 5. Again, it is best not to suppose more than the Bible teaches – it does not reveal how they knew
- E. **Verse 4** – Why did Peter offer to build three shelters for them?
1. Perhaps, consistent with his nature, Peter was being impetuous; prone to jumping into immediate action – He often had more zeal than discretion
 - a. It was Peter who asked to walk on the water

- b. It was Peter who spoke on behalf of the other disciples and made the grand profession in the previous chapter, “You are the Christ.” And then took Jesus aside to rebuke Him.
 - c. It was Peter that announced that Jesus would never wash his feet and then quickly reversed his statement.
John 13:8-9 NAU - "Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, *then wash* not only my feet, but also my hands and my head."
 - d. It was Peter that drew his sword and cut off the ear of one of the servants at the arrest of Jesus.
John 18:10 NAU - "Simon Peter then, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus."
2. Perhaps it simply demonstrates the great shock of the vision – While James and John were speechless, Peter was simply speaking incoherently
Mark 9:6 NAU - "For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified."
Peter really didn't know what to say or how to respond.
3. Regardless of the reason, it seems like an unreasonable response to the scene.
- a. Would the glorified Jesus have been unable to protect Himself from the elements?
And why would Moses and Elijah need earthly shelters – they had just come from heaven?
 - b. What kind of structure could have been constructed from the branches and shrubbery immediately available?
 - c. It also failed to take into account the infinite superiority of Jesus to Moses and Elijah. Peter's response seems to put the three on an equal status. He wanted to build tabernacles for all three. And it seems to ignore the previous confession of Peter that Jesus alone was the Christ.
 - d. Most significant, it was one more demonstration that Peter failed to understand the nature of the Messiah and the work of Christ. Peter wanted to maintain the glory of the moment, yet Jesus' time had not yet come. It was not yet time for His exaltation.
Mark 8:31 NAU - "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."
 - e. And our Lord's answer was significant. There was no answer, as if to say, “What I have spoken, I have spoken.”
4. To Peter's credit
- a. It demonstrates Peter's desire to prolong the glorious scene. He recognized the great glory of the moment
Verse 5 - "Master, it is good for us to be here"
The offer of shelter is an offer for them to remain.

- b. There was no sign of selfishness – he only suggested shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah
- c. He placed the question at the wisdom of our Lord –
Matt 17:4 - "if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here"

Conclusion: - some thoughts to consider

1. For us, the way of the transfiguration is always more glorious than the way of the difficulties of discipleship.
It is always good to be near Christ—to sit at His feet.
Look at Mary's example and Jesus' commendation.
Luke 10:38-42 NAU - "Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up *to Him* and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; ⁴² but *only* one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."
2. We should always want to prolong the times of worship and intimacy – It is always good to be apart from the world and alone with Christ.
3. Yet we must always be willing to come down and labor. We must return to the trenches. While Peter, James, and John were on the mountain top the other disciples were laboring, contending with the multitudes.
Mark 9:14 NAU - "When they came *back* to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and *some* scribes arguing with them."
4. We must never forget the work before us.
Paul knew this. As he considered departing to be gloriously with Christ or remaining in the trenches of earth he knew what he must do.
Philippians 1:21-25 NAU - "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. ²³ But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better; ²⁴ yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith,"