

Feb. 15, 2015 – Mark 9:2-9 (OT: Exodus 34:29-35 Epistle: 2 Corinthians 3:12-18; 4:1-6)

A glimpse of glory that gives us hope:

- *Hope for eternal life*
- *Hope for transformation*
- *Hope for times of darkness*

I am sure that we all have had at least one “mountaintop experience” – maybe even a number of them. These are times that have been particularly enjoyable and meaningful. It may have been on a vacation or at a church retreat or event. We often wish that we could have stayed in that moment and not had to go back to our “normal lives”.

In our Gospel reading Peter, James and John had a mountaintop experience themselves. Jesus “*led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them*” (v. 2). It is probably from this event and other times in the Bible when people had dramatic encounters with God on a mountain that we get the phrase “a mountaintop experience”.

We often look back at these times with fond memories. The experience Peter, James and John had with Jesus, however, encourages us not to look back, but to look forward. In Jesus’ transfiguration we get a glimpse of glory that gives us hope: hope for eternal life, hope for transformation, and hope for the times of darkness we may experience in this life.

Elijah and Moses appeared on the mountain and talked with Jesus. This shows us that there is eternal life. Moses died in the land of Moab after leading the Israelites to the eastern border of the promised land. He died over fourteen hundred years before Jesus was born (see Deuteronomy 34). His appearance here with Jesus shows that there is life after death.

Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind across the Jordan river from Jericho. This was the same region where Moses had died some six hundred years earlier (see 2 Kings 2). Elijah did not die but was taken up directly. His appearance here, around eight hundred years later, shows that he continued to live. This again shows that there is eternal life.

The Sadducees were a Jewish sect at the time of Jesus that did not believe in eternal life or in the resurrection. They tried to trap Jesus with what they considered a logical absurdity. In Jewish law, if a man died without children, his brother was to take his wife and their first child would be considered the heir of the deceased brother. They proposed a hypothetical situation in which seven brothers all died childless and the wife of the first had become the wife of each of them in turn. They asked Jesus, “*In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife*” (Mark 12:23). Jesus explained that there is no marriage after the resurrection, so their logical argument against there even being a resurrection was not valid.

Jesus went on to say something very important: “*And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong*” (Mark 12:26-27).

While we don’t see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob here, we do see Moses. It was to Moses that God identified Himself as the God of these three forefathers of Moses. These men had died, but Jesus’ statement says that they will live again, because God “*is not God of the dead, but of the living*” (Mark 12:27). The appearance of Moses and Elijah demonstrates this fact before our eyes!

If that were all, that would not be enough to give us hope. Jesus said that “*the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good,*

to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28). Into which of these two groups will you fall?

How does your life measure up to God’s standards? Both you and I have all fallen short and have failed to do the good that God wants us to and so often we have done things that God tells us not to do. We don’t want to call the things we have done “evil” (unless some else is doing them), but that is what they are in God’s sight. Because of our sin we deserve the resurrection of condemnation not the resurrection of life.

This glimpse of glory, however, gives us hope. The appearance of Moses reminds us of the Law, which condemns us; it was given through Moses on the top of Mount Sinai. The appearance of Elijah reminds us of the prophets who condemned the people for turning away from God but also foretold of the coming Savior. Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus. Luke tells us that they spoke to Jesus about “*His decease* (literally “exodus”) *which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem*” (Luke 9:31). They talked to Jesus about His death and resurrection that would pay for the sins of the whole world and bring eternal life to those who believe in Him.

Six days before this trip up the mountain Jesus had told His disciples “*that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again*” (Mark 8:31). Jesus here reminds His disciples that He must die and rise again when He commands “*them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead*” (v. 9). And the voice of God Himself in the cloud confirmed that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, whom He sent to bring us everlasting life.

The appearance of Moses and Elijah point us to the fact that Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets by His perfect obedience to God in our place. He was obedient even to the point of dying on the cross to pay for and take away your sins (Philippians 2:8). Because of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection you have the expectant hope of eternal life.

This account shows us another hope that we have. On this mountaintop Jesus was “transfigured” (v. 2). The word used here is the source of our English word “metamorphosis”. It means to “be changed or transformed.” Matthew tells us that Jesus’ “*face shone like the sun*” (Matthew 17:2). This doesn’t surprise us any because Jesus is God made flesh. Here we see a glimpse of Jesus’ divine glory – a glimpse of the fullness of the Godhead that dwelt in Jesus’ body (Colossians 2:9).

But do you notice the detail that Mark records? He writes: “*His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them*” (v. 3). We would expect Jesus Himself to change, but look at the effect He had on His clothes! This gives us hope – hope for our transformation.

Are you happy with yourself? Is there anything about you or your life that could be improved? Evidently a lot of people in the U.S. think that they could be doing better as more than \$10 billion per year is spent on self-improvement¹. The world’s advice on how to be a better person or have a better life, however, is not very effective. This can be seen in the studies that show that most likely person to purchase a self-help book is someone who already purchased one in the previous eighteen months. If the first one worked, why would they need the second?

1. <http://brainblogger.com/2014/05/23/the-self-help-industry-helps-itself-to-billions-of-dollars>

The truth is that Jesus, our Savior, is only One who can truly transform us. He is the only one who can make us a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). So we turn not to self-help books or programs, but to the Son of God and to His word for the change we so desperately need and want.

It may seem like a leap to go from Jesus' clothes here being changed to Jesus changing us, but we see the effects of being in God's presence on Moses in our Old Testament reading. After spending time with God during his mountaintop experience "*the skin of his face shone*" (Exodus 34:29) so that he had to put a veil over his face when he left God's presence. Our Epistle reading explains that Moses put on this veil so that the Israelites would not see that this glory was just temporary and was passing away (2 Corinthians 3:13). This was just like the Law that Moses brought: it could only produce a temporary, external obedience, but the Law could not produce true righteousness before God.

But what the law could not do because it was weakened by the flesh, "*God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh*" (Romans 8:3). Paul tells us that our Lord Jesus Christ "*will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself*" (Philippians 3:21). As we read in 2 Corinthians 3:18: "*we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*"

When we read this account in the Gospel of Mark, we usually think of it as the transfiguration of *Jesus*. But it actually shows us a glimpse of *our* transformation – as we are being transformed into His likeness. It is God brings about this transformation in us and conforms us to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29).

When we have a "mountaintop experience" it can be hard to "come down from the mountain." We would rather stay there in the moment. Peter felt the same way on this occasion. He said, "*Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah*" (v. 5).

But Jesus and these three disciples could not stay on this mountain. In order for Jesus to fulfill the Law and Prophets and redeem the world from sin and death, He had to come down from the mountain and continue on His way to His death on the cross in our place. In contrast the bright glory they had seen on this mountain, the remaining time must have often seemed dark indeed.

We, too, can experience times of darkness in this life. The glimpse of glory that we get here gives us hope for these times as well. This hope is found in the hope of eternal life and also in the glorious transformation that God is working in us. This hope is also found in what the voice from cloud said: "*This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!*" (v. 7). God points us to His Son, Jesus, and tells us to hear what He has to say.

God wants you to hear all the great promises Jesus speaks to you. To hear that He came to fulfill the Law and the prophets (Matthew 5:17). To hear that He came to give His life as a ransom for you (Mark 10:45) and to rise from the dead, so that even though you may die, yet you will live (John 11:25). And to hear that He is always with you, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). Though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, Jesus is with you (Psalm 23:4).

Peter writes about this mountaintop experience in 2 Peter 1:16-19: "*For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'* And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to

heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

God’s word is a light that shines in a dark place – a light that gives us comfort and hope. This glimpse of glory confirms God’s word and tells us to listen and cling to it, especially when things seem dark and hopeless.

You may have had a number of “mountaintop experiences” in your life that have given you fond memories to look back on. But remember the mountaintop experience of Jesus, Peter, James, and John – it gives you a glimpse of glory that gives you hope: hope for the times of darkness in this life because the glorious Son of God is with you always; hope for a glorious transformation performed by God to make you like Jesus, without spot or blemish; and hope for everlasting life with God in the presence of His glory, where you will shine like stars (see Daniel 12:3, Matthew 13:43).

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