

## Peter and Jesus at the Transfiguration

TEXT: Mk 9:1-10

Words for kids:

PHBF 7.10.11

Scr. Reading: Mk 9:1-10

The Life of Simon Peter

Imagine living with Jesus of Nazareth for all the years of His life and ministry – being one of actual 12 disciples, and then later being asked to pick out one story to tell. Any story from any period or setting in your experience with Jesus, but you get to tell only one. What incident would you talk about? Would you go for significance and talk about the resurrection? Or would you go for the personal touch and tell of a moment shared by only Jesus and you – perhaps the moment he called you or His answer to that key question you’ve always wanted to ask God? Perhaps you’d go with the most sensational and talk about Jesus’ feeding the 5000 or walking on water or bringing Lazarus back to life.

We know what story Simon Peter would tell, because he does exactly that. In the two books of the NT which he wrote himself, he refers to only one specific incident from his many experiences with Jesus. Just one! This must have been a defining moment for Peter. Can you think which it is?

**2 Peter 1:16-18** <sup>16</sup> *For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.* <sup>17</sup> *For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,"* <sup>18</sup> *we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.*

He’s describing the Transfiguration. Apparently it had a tremendous impact upon Peter—Jesus in His full glory! Notice how he describes the event: **[reread the underlined clauses above].**

The Transfiguration is the most significant moment of Jesus’ life between His incarnation and His passion. This is the most powerful revelation of Jesus’ glory that Peter saw in Jesus’ lifetime.

Imagine the scene...

- Just days earlier, Jesus had queried his disciples: “Who do people say I am?” “John the Baptist, Elijah, a prophet.” “Who do

you say I am?” Peter: “The Christ.” (8:27-30)

- Following this exchange, Jesus began to teach them of His suffering and death. Shocking to the disciples, but even more unsettling was His summons to a death of their own: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (10:35).
- All this takes place miles and miles north of Jerusalem, in the furthest reaches of Galilee. For six days they travel, and then Jesus calls out the inner three once again. “Jesus took Peter...” (v 2) – This is an intentional experience Jesus is setting up for these men.
- Hiking up the mountain, wondering what Jesus is up to this time, thinking over the strange things He’s been teaching lately.
- Trip seems to have taken all day – Luke tells us the three disciples were “heavy with sleep.” Jesus was praying, and they were snoozing.
- Radiant light suddenly disrupts their slumber. Mark says, “he was transfigured before them.” His face and clothing became as bright as the sun. Every pore of His skin and every stitch of His robe radiates with brilliance. I would say Jesus is on fire, but it’s more like Jesus IS fire. Light is literally spilling out of Him.
- Two figures take shape in the glow – Moses and Elijah. If the prominent figures of the OT were a mountain range, these two peaks catch everyone’s attention. Moses, Lawgiver, one who saw God’s glory and lived. Elijah, prophet, miracle-worker, man who never died but was swept up to heaven in a chariot of fire. Luke tells us they are talking about the new exodus Jesus was going to accomplish at Jerusalem through His death and resurrection (9:31). Must have been a very cool experience for Moses!
- Needless to say, all of this has a dramatic effect on Peter, James and John. They are now quite wide awake, and they are terrified. When some people get scared, they go silent. Others scream. Apparently, Peter talks. He is terrified at what he’s seeing, so he clears his throat, opens his mouth, and inserts his foot. “Rabbi, it’s good for us to be here. Let us make three tents.” “For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified” (Mk 9:6).
- But even as Peter was finishing his ill-conceived sentence (Mt

17:5), a cloud covers the mountain and another voice speaks. God Himself has joined them. It's the cloud of glory, the cloud that used to lead the Israelites through the wilderness, the cloud that filled the tabernacle and the temple, the cloud that signaled God's very presence. As if that weren't enough, He speaks to them: "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." It's a declaration of the Father's joy in the Son and the Son's exclusive right to be heard.

- The voice knocks the disciples to the ground, and they hide their faces (Mt 17:6). Jesus touches the men and says, "Don't be afraid." They look up into His face and find it normal again. Just as suddenly as it began, it's over. They are alone.

So what do we learn from all this?

### **The preeminent person in the universe is Jesus of Nazareth.**

Everything in this story points to the supremacy of Jesus. The mountaintop, the radiance, the OT figures, the cloud, the voice...

So many of the high points of Scripture happen on mountains— Abraham offering Isaac on Mount Moriah, Moses and the burning bush on Mount Sinai, Israel receiving the 10 Commandments also on Sinai, Elijah being swept away to heaven from Mount Horeb, Jesus atoning for sins on Golgotha. And now this.

What about Jesus' shining face? Moses spent time on the mountain and emerged with radiant glory on his face, but his was a reflective glory. He was the moon, reflecting the sun of God's own splendence. But in Jesus' case, this glory is entirely His own, the brightness of the sun itself shining from within, not reflecting from without.

What about these two men, Elijah & Moses? Here are two well-known spokesmen for God—Moses, reminiscent of the Law, and Elijah, reminiscent of the whole stream of OT prophets. But even in the presence of these two great men, it's Jesus' glory that shines and Jesus' identity that the Father comments on. The voice does not say "listen to Moses, listen to Elijah." He says, "Listen to my Son." It's a revelation-story, telling us something significant and something awesome about

Jesus – namely, Jesus is superior to and He is the fulfillment of all the OT Law and Prophets.

Add to all this the cloud of glory and the voice of affirmation, and we see that this man Jesus is utterly unique and glorious. No other human being possesses this kind of greatness and majesty. All the great figures of history, politics, science, literature, athletics, philosophy, and religion would have been on their faces, right next to Peter if they had been on this mountain. No comparison. No rivals. No competition.

But here's the question for you. Does Jesus occupy this kind of place of preeminence in your own soul? Does He provoke the most intense reactions in your heart? Are you more excited to meet Him than any other individual? Is your greatest fear to displease Him or find yourself in His disfavor? Do you love Him and adore Him and find yourself constantly preoccupied with Him? If not, you need to join Peter on this mountain and take in a fresh appreciation for the transfiguration.

### **We listen to Jesus best after we've seen Him the clearest.**

Jesus has just said some hard things to His followers. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and carry his cross and follow. Whoever would save his life will lose it. If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him." We've heard some hard sermons on these verses. Bret preached on "The Cross Walk" and Lars asked repeatedly, "Is the cost of following Christ too high? The cost of not following Jesus is even higher."

How are these sermons going to come to us as good news? How is this the message of the gospel and not the law? The law kills—duties we can't perform and righteousness we can't fulfill. Without the gospel, we will do one of two things with commands like this. Either we will try and fail and give up in guilt and despair, or we will succeed at least enough to feel comfortable and become proud of our own success. Both are forms of death—despair over our failure or pride over our success. How can we hear Jesus' call to take up our cross and follow without being killed by it?

When we start with a vision of glory. When we see Jesus as He really is— brilliant, explosive, shocking, glorious—it becomes more natural to obey His summons to deny ourselves and follow Him. When we see Him as He truly is, we will fear Him and love Him the way we ought.

Can I make a practical suggestion to you at this point? Read your Bible. The pages of Scripture blaze with the glory of the Savior.

**2 Peter 1:16-19** ...we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. <sup>17</sup> For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," <sup>18</sup> we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. <sup>19</sup> And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts

Peter uses his experience on the mountain to urge his readers on to their own experience of Christ, found in the word. Yes, it's a dimmer light than what Peter saw on the mountain—"as to a lamp shining in a dark place"—but it's still the same light shining and the same voice speaking. And someday soon in glory, we will experience the full light Peter saw: "until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."

### **When Jesus' glory shines, His kingdom comes.**

Notice how this whole scene begins. In verse 1, Jesus says: "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." We will miss much of the significance of the transfiguration if we overlook this puzzling promise.

Jesus promises the disciples that some of them are going to see the kingdom of God coming with power before they die. All three of the writers who include the story of the transfiguration—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—include this remark from Jesus. And all three of them include a little transitional phrase like this: "after six days." The point is, Jesus' promise about seeing the kingdom and the revelation of His glory on the

mountain are linked. This is a story about glory and it's a story about the coming of the kingdom (cf. 9:1). What's the link?

Jesus' glory in the transfiguration is a preview of the kingdom. Several passages testify to the glory Christ will display at His coming. Look right up the page to Mark 8:38:

*For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.* (cf. Dan. 7:13–27; Mt 16:28; 2 Thes 1: 7-10; Rev 19:11-16)

We might think of the coming of Jesus' kingdom primarily as an ethical thing, where people all start doing what is right. Or we might think of it politically, where Jesus rules over all as Lord and King. But in this passage, even though none of those things come to be, Jesus' kingdom still comes. How? In what? In glory.

We were made to experience glory, which is simply to say, we were made to inhabit the kingdom of Jesus! Our hearts long for greatness. It's why we applaud great music and great athletic performances and great feats of engineering. It's why we are drawn to high mountains and deep canyons. We want to be around something awesome! Our hearts were made for glory.

The problem is, in our sinfulness, we can't take in the greatest glory in the universe—the glory of God's Son. Here's where we identify so closely with Peter in this story. Traditionally, interpreters have suggested Peter was trying to prolong the experience by building these tents for Jesus and Moses and Elijah. But that doesn't seem to fit Peter's emotional state very well. His opening words are more a question than a statement: "Master, is it good for us to be here?" He knew no one can see the unveiled glory of God and live. He is confused and afraid, and he's trying to cope with his terror. His suggestion about building tents is directly in line with the tabernacle, where the radiance of God's glory was veiled from the people, in part to protect them. Peter feels genuine fear for his own life, and he is taking steps to protect himself and his two friends from lethal glory.

But God, in His great mercy, provides Peter exactly what he's been

seeking—a shroud, some kind of protection, a shield from the brilliant light. The cloud comes, the voice speaks, and Jesus' glory fades. In the gospel, He does the same for us.

**2 Corinthians 3:7-18 NLT** <sup>7</sup> *The old way, with laws etched in stone, led to death, though it began with such glory that the people of Israel could not bear to look at Moses' face. For his face shone with the glory of God, even though the brightness was already fading away.* <sup>8</sup> *Shouldn't we expect far greater glory under the new way, now that the Holy Spirit is giving life?* <sup>9</sup> *If the old way, which brings condemnation, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new way, which makes us right with God!* <sup>10</sup> *In fact, that first glory was not glorious at all compared with the overwhelming glory of the new way.* <sup>11</sup> *So if the old way, which has been replaced, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new, which remains forever!* <sup>12</sup> *Since this new way gives us such confidence, we can be very bold.* <sup>13</sup> *We are not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so the people of Israel would not see the glory, even though it was destined to fade away.* <sup>14</sup> *But the people's minds were hardened, and to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, the same veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ.* <sup>15</sup> *Yes, even today when they read Moses' writings, their hearts are covered with that veil, and they do not understand.* <sup>16</sup> *But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.* <sup>17</sup> *For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.* <sup>18</sup> *So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord-- who is the Spirit-- makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.*

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