Mark Lesson 28 (2023)

**THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS**

Mark 9:2-13

Key Verse: 9:2b-3

“There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.”

In the previous passage, Jesus predicted that he must suffer many things, be rejected and even killed, and rise again on the third day. He also told them that if anyone wanted to be his disciple, they must first deny themselves and take up their cross. It means that we should no longer live a self-centered life but live a Christ-centered life, and we should be ready even to die for him. (8:31-38) Hearing what Jesus said about his terrible suffering, even death, and the high cost of discipleship, the disciples no longer felt excited about following him. Some followers wanted to give up because following Christ was too costly (Jn. 6:60). We surely understand their sentiment.

In today’s passage, Jesus invited some of his close disciples to a high mountain, where he revealed his original glory as the Son of God. We call this event *“the Transfiguration.”* Simon Peter was one of those who witnessed the glorious transfiguration of Jesus. His experience on the mountain left him with an unforgettable image of Christ Jesus. It also enabled him to have courageous faith to confront trials and challenges in his life and ministry. Most of all, he was transformed into a new person, the person whom God wanted him to be. This morning, may we also go up on the mountain of transfiguration and see the glorious image of Christ. We also want to ponder what this magnificent image of Christ means to us.

Look at verse 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.” Six days had passed since Jesus disclosed the critical information about what kind of Messiah he would be. The disciples were surprised to hear that Jesus, whom they had just confessed as the Messiah, said that he must suffer, be rejected, and be killed. Jesus also told them that suffering and death would be his destiny and theirs. (8:34-38) By this time, most of his disciples realized that his teaching was no longer fun for them. We don’t know what they did during the six days. A heavy sense of disappointment overshadowed their minds. The level of anxiety was high, and no one wanted to talk to anybody else. We don’t know what Jesus tried to do during the six days. Jesus might have left them alone to struggle and ponder upon what he told them. But after six days, Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a mountain, possibly Mount Hermon, about 9,000 feet high. (Pic#1)

 Before getting into what happened on the mountain, why do you think Jesus took only three disciples? We know it wasn’t the first time Jesus took only these three. For example, when Jesus was going to raise the dead daughter of Jairus, he took only these three with him into the room (Mk. 5:37). He also did the same as he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane (14:33). Why did he do that? Is it because he loved these three more than others? I don’t believe so. Indeed, Jesus loved them equally. Yet, Jesus often separated them from the other disciples because he was training them for leadership, recognizing their spiritual aptitude and quality. I wonder how the other disciples felt about it. They thought it was unfair.

However, it does not mean those not in leadership cannot develop a close love relationship with Christ Jesus. The critical truth is that as believers in Christ, all of us can be as close to Jesus as we want. It reminds us of James 4:8 states, “Come near to God, and he will come near to you.” The love relationship between Jesus and us is not one-sided. As Jesus loves us dearly, we also must respond to his love. (Jn. 21:15-19)

Now, let’s go back to the mountain. What happened on the mountain? Verse 2 said that when they were all alone on the mountain, potentially in the middle of the night, Jesus was transfigured right before their eyes.

What does it mean to be transfigured? It means to be changed in appearance. The word ***“transfigured”*** is a translation of the Greek word *“metamorphosis,”* ***Metamorphosis*** is a process in the world of nature in which a caterpillar wraps a cocoon around itself, and after a period, out of that cocoon comes a beautiful butterfly (Pic#2). We don’t know how long it took for Jesus’ transfiguration. I am sure it didn’t take long, but it happened instantly. Jesus took humanity on himself when he came into the world. He wore ordinary clothing and worked as a carpenter in Nazareth. He ate typical food like everyone else. But he was more than a man. He was God in man. Now, his appearance changed, revealing what he was on the inside.

Look at verse 3. “His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.” Mark’s description sounded as if only his clothes had changed. Both Matthew and Luke testify that his face shone like the sun. (Mt. 17:2; Lk. 9:29) No wonder his clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone could bleach, meaning it was brilliantly shining. It’s hard to look at sunlight directly. If we look at sunlight directly, it could damage our eyes, and we become blind. And that happened to Paul when he first met the Risen Christ on the way to Damascus. (Acts 9:8-9) (Pic#2b) Later, Apostle Paul testified, saying, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6)

What does it mean that his face shone like the sun? What does it say about Jesus? It shows that Jesus is God. Revelation 1:13-16 depicts the image of Christ: “And standing in the middle of the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man. He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were like flames of fire.His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered like mighty ocean waves. He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth. And his face was like the sun in all its brilliance.” (NLT) The transfigured Jesus is the original image of God, who is infinite, immortal, almighty, majestic, inconceivable, indestructible, incorruptible, and uncontainable. The transfiguration of Jesus clearly shows that Jesus is God. But he became a man to save us from our sins and give us everlasting life. What an awesome God the transfigured Jesus is! This Jesus is a preview of his glory when he comes again to judge the living and the dead.

How is transfiguration different from transformation? *Why it’s called “the transfiguration of Jesus” and not “the transformation of Jesus”?* Transfiguration and transformation are similar terms that can be used interchangeably in some contexts. But they can have different meanings. Generally, transfiguration refers to a process of changing outward appearance. In contrast, transformation often refers to a process of inner nature or structure. Jesus’ inner core does not need to change. Jesus’ transfiguration didn’t alter his inner divine nature but his outward appearance.

The transfiguration of Jesus was just the beginning of what happened on the mountain. Look at verse 4. “And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.” (Pic#3) We see more participants in verses 4-7: Elijah and Moses also appeared. We don’t know why only Elijah and Moses appeared among all the prophets in Israel. Generally, it was understood that Moses represented Law and Elijah prophets in the Old Testament.

 By the way, what did they talk about? We don’t know for sure. Mark didn’t record the content of their conversation. But Luke informed that they spoke about Jesus’ departure, which he was about to bring fulfillment at Jerusalem, the work of the Messiah through his suffering, death, and resurrection. (Lk. 9:31) Their appearance with Jesus at this time was a powerful endorsement of Christ’s redeeming work by these two representatives of the Old Testament. Yet, Simon didn’t understand the meaning of what happened there on the mountain.

 Look at verses 5 and 6. “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.’ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.).”We wonder how Peter could recognize who they were. I don’t think Peter saw their pictures. Is it possible that Moses and Elijah wore nametags, as we do at the conference? (Pic#4) No. Then, how could he recognize them? Peter might have recognized them through an intuition given by God. After all, Peter said that he wanted to build nice shelters for each of them. He was very excited about it.

Even though Mark commented that Peter didn’t know what to say, what came out of his mouth was precisely what he had in mind. He had the things of men, not the things of God. When he saw the glorious Jesus, with Moses and Elijah on each side, he was utterly misled by his human desire to think that Jesus would immediately set up his earthly messianic kingdom. So, he said that he would build three shelters for each of them. Jesus could’ve rebuked him, saying, “Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” (8:33) But he didn’t.

 This time, God intervened directly. Look at verse 7. “Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: ‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!’” The appearance of clouds usually represents God’s presence, power, and protection in the Old Testament. And out of the cloud, a voice spoke to them, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” It was a strong endorsement of God for Jesus on behalf of these three disciples. What do they have to listen to? They should listen to Jesus’ message about his messianic work through suffering, death, and resurrection.

 Look at verses 8-10. “Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. 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. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what ‘rising from the dead’ meant.” Their experience on the mountain was exceptional. It was a preview of God’s coming kingdom with power and glory. But Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone about what they saw until he had risen from the dead.

 But what puzzled them now was Jesus’ saying of his rising from the dead. So, they asked Jesus in verse 11. “Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?” They wondered about Elijah because of his appearance on the mountain because they knew about the coming of Elijah before the day of the Lord based on Malachi 4:5-6. , which states, “See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parents, or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.”

The disciples wondered if Elijah would come and restore everything and why the Messiah needed to suffer. Jesus answered their questions in verses 12 and 13. “Jesus replied, ‘To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wish3d, just as it is written about him.’”When Jesus said, “Elijah has come,” he meant John the Baptist. (Mt. 11;14-15) But John the Baptist was martyred by Herod the tetrarch not long ago. (6:14-29) It appears as though his life of mission was a failure because he died too early before restoring all things. So, Jesus’ disciples were asking if they should wait for another Elijah. According to Jesus, no. Because all things prophesied about Elijah had been restored by John the Baptist, and his early death fulfilled the prophecy about him. Jesus predicted that the Jewish religious leaders, who failed to recognize Elijah and killed him, would also fail to recognize Jesus as the Messiah and kill him.

Let me close the sermon. Jesus’ changed appearance on the mountain was glorious and fantastic. It showed the original glory of Jesus as the Son of God. Three disciples, Peter, James, and John, witnessed this tremendous event. It was good that at least three of them were together on the mountain. What if only one person was there and talked about his experience on the mountain? Would his testimony be considered valid? Maybe not. But three top disciples were there. Even though they didn’t understand what they experienced on the mountain and what Jesus said about the suffering and death of the Messiah at the time, they eventually came to know that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, the Messiah, after his resurrection from the dead. They also realize that the way of the cross was God’s way of salvation for all humankind.

The glorious and majestic image of the transfigured Jesus gave them courageous faith to confront all kinds of trials and challenges in life. James became the first martyr among the Apostles, while his brother John served the Lord and his people longest until tinning of the next century. Simon Peter became a compassionate shepherd for God’s flock. He could do so through his experience on the mountain. (2 Peter 1:16-18)

Jesus is God the Eternal who put a human body on himself. He ate with people, talked with them, and walked with them. Before starting his messianic ministry, he worked as a carpenter and supported his family. He spent three years with his disciples, teaching them God’s truth and showing his divine power and compassion through healing many sick people. But why did he suffer, be rejected, and be killed? If he were God, why did he choose such a horrible way? It’s because he knew it was God’s way to defeat evil with good and provide the grace of forgiveness and everlasting life for all those who believe in him.

So what does Jesus’ transfiguration mean to us? What does his transfiguration have to do with our lives today? It surely means more than we can imagine. Death is not our final destiny, but Christ Jesus is. He is our ultimate hope. And he lives in us through the Holy Spirit. We can experience God’s living presence in us now and forever.

The world we live in today is becoming more unstable, unsafe, and dangerous than ever in history. Every day we hear bad news about shootings, gun violence even in schools, lawlessness, injustice, exploitation, natural disasters, civil wars, international military conflicts, ecological crises, global warming, etc. I don’t want to be pessimistic. But what shall we do? Many people are experiencing a high level of stress and anxiety, more than they can bear. But Christians who believe in Jesus can live differently. We can overcome the world through our faith in Jesus.

When Stephen was stoned by those who hated God and Jesus, he was unafraid of anything. He looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He said, “Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” As he fell asleep, he prayed, saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Do not hold this sin against them.” He also overcame evil with good. There was no hint of bitterness or hatred. He was full of love. He overcame the world. He was more than a conqueror (Ro. 8:37).

No matter what happens to us personally or the world, we must know we have a sure and living hope in Christ Jesus. Even though the world has turned upside down, Jesus is the foundation of our lives. We must believe that those who trust in the Lord will not be put to shame and disappointed because he is everything. We should not be discouraged and succumb to evil no matter what happens to us or the world. The glorious image of the transfigured Jesus is a preview of our magnificent resurrection body and the transformation of our inner beauty in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, we should not compare ourselves with others. Should we look back and look around? No. We should turn our eyes on Jesus daily, following his footsteps by denying ourselves and taking up our cross. Life can be distracting and burdensome even when we are determined to fix our eyes on Christ Jesus. Following the footsteps of Jesus is the way that leads us to eternal life. We will never regret it in the end. Life in this world is tough, never easy. But it can be much better when we encourage one another. The well-being of our soul largely depends on our relationship with others. So, my dear brothers and sisters, let us encourage one another to have the hope of heaven as we do our best to love and serve one another in Christ Jesus. May we fix our eyes on Jesus, our crown, and the most significant reward in heaven, which will never fade away.