

2/11/2024

Mark 9:2-9

That was weird. Some parts of Jesus' ministry are beautiful and tender, like when Jesus welcomes and blesses little children. Some parts of Jesus' ministry are powerful and surprising- like when Jesus calms the storm or feeds the 5000. Some are striking, like when Jesus flips over the tables in the temple courts. Some parts of Jesus' ministry are, quite frankly, bizarre and leave us scratching our heads. Jesus' transfiguration, at least for me, has always been weird. Why go on this mountain and just take three disciples? Why does he let himself be changed like this? What are Moses and Elijah doing there? Why would Peter offer to build shelters for them? Why does the Father come in the cloud and say what he says? What's the point of all this? Jesus is saying in the clearest, most powerful possible way, the theme for today's sermon: **“Don't forget who I really am.” 1. “I am the source of God's glory.” 2. “I am the joy of Moses and Elijah.” 3. “I am your life in God's cloud.”**

1. The Source of God's Glory. One phrase you'll find throughout the Bible, especially in Exodus, is the “Glory of the LORD.” What exactly is that? God's “glory” can be difficult to define. What we see in Scripture is this: God is so beautiful, so holy, so great, so perfect, so powerful, so good, that his very presence blinds people, terrifies people, and kills them if they get too close. In Exodus, Moses goes up Mt. Sinai and asks to see God's glory. God says, “no, it will kill you.” But then he places Moses in a cave in the Mountain and he passes by and Moses sees the tail end of God's “glory.” When he goes back down the mountain, his face is glowing from that encounter, and people are afraid to talk to him, so he has to put a veil over his face. So, if we had to define God's glory, it is his blinding, deadly, perfection so powerful that if anything, or anyone imperfect were to get too close, that imperfect person would cease to exist. Here, we have something similar to Moses' encounter with God's glory- Jesus and his three closest disciples climb up this mountain, and unlike Moses, Jesus doesn't simply reflect God's glory, he reveals it. He shines as the source of God's glory- absolutely blinding- whiter than any person on earth could make it, Mark's way of saying that Jesus was supernaturally, unearthly, blindingly white!

Do you see what Jesus is saying here? Jesus is not simply a Moses that reflects God's glory. He is the source of God's glory because he is himself God. You see, when Jesus came to earth as a baby born of the Virgin Mary, he entered what we call his “State of Humiliation.” That means that the perfect, glorious, powerful God hid his glory. He didn't lose access to it. He didn't become less powerful, less perfect, less God. But he hid it. He hid glory- “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity. Pleased as man with men to dwell. Jesus our Immanuel.” Jesus hid his glory so that sinful, imperfect, broken human beings could touch, embrace, kiss God and not die. And on this mountain, in the presence of Peter, James, and John, Jesus stops hiding his glory, just for a little bit. Jesus, if you think about it, is not performing a miracle, he's pausing the miracle that has been ongoing for the last 32 years. He's revealing who he *really* is so that his disciples never forget who he *really* is. Why? Because after he descends this mountain, Jesus is going to become shockingly ugly. Instead of clothes whiter than the sun, he will be stripped naked and his skin will be shredded apart by whips. Instead of his face shining like the sun, it will be covered in the spit and mucus of his enemies. People are going to look away from him like his disciples are now, but it will be because of his ugliness, shamefulness and death. And Jesus is telling his disciples, “Never forget who I really am. I am glorious- the source of God's glory.”

2. "I am the joy of Moses and Elijah." So that's what Jesus is saying with his brightness, but why are Moses and Elijah here? Several things could be said. Moses and Elijah are the two biggest figures in the Old Testament. Moses was the one who wrote the first five books of the Old Testament, the one who recorded the Law of God, the one who led Israel out of Egypt into the promised land, the most important leader of God's people to ever exist. Elijah would have been one of, if not the most, famous prophet of the Old Testament. The miracles he performed, the way that he stood up to evil king Ahaz and Jezebel, and his fiery sermons of repentance make him the "Prophet of prophets" in Jewish thinking. So, why are they here? It's helpful to know the context of this event. Before this whole event happened, Jesus had explained to all of his disciples that he was going to suffer and die, and that those who follow him should expect pain, sorrow, discomfort, and rejection in this life- because that's what Jesus experienced! What Jesus is now showing is the reward. Those who believe in Jesus, like Moses and Elijah, not only get to see God's glory, but share in it at his side. But there's more! Moses and Elijah are *talking* with Jesus. What are they talking about? From Luke's Gospel, we know that they were talking about his death. Why are they talking about that? Because Jesus' death on the Cross is the ultimate event that every smaller event of the Old Testament points to. Moses wrote down all the necessary sacrifices needed to appease God's righteous wrath over sin- go read Leviticus and see for yourself how many there are! And now before Moses is the one who would be the ultimate sacrifice to end all sacrifice to forgive the sins of not only Israel, but the whole world. Elijah, throughout his ministry, was desperately trying to call his people away from their idols and immorality back to God, and they mostly refused him. And now there before him was the ultimate prophet who through his death would change the hearts of sinners and destroy the wall of sin that stands between a holy God and his rebellious people. Jesus is not only the God of Moses and Elijah- he's their joy- the one who would fulfill and accomplish what they had hoped for so long!

Why did Jesus need his disciples to see this? Because the events of Good Friday weren't only shocking physically, but theologically. The disciples knew that Jesus was the long foretold Messiah described in the Old Testament, but on Good Friday, the religious leaders of Israel, the Sanhedrin, Pharisees, High Priests, would condemn Jesus with the highest religious crime: blasphemy- to claim a power or authority that belongs to God alone- and everything they believed about God, the Messiah, salvation, and the victory that he would win would be destroyed. But here, Jesus is letting them know that his death was always part of the plan, was always predicted in the Old Testament, and looked with a horrible, but joyful awe by no one less than Moses and Elijah.

3. "I am your life in the cloud." What do you make of Peter's actions here? He says, "it's good for us to be here." That's a true, pious statement. It is good for them to be here- they recognize that what they are seeing is beautiful, profound, and they want to be there! But what Peter suggests next is striking. He offers to build three shelters- but I don't love the way the NIV translates the Greek there. Literally, the Greek word is "tent." If Peter was simply saying that he wanted to stay there and he was willing to build them some shelter for them to rest in, he would have used a different word. The word "tent" had special significance for Jewish people familiar with the Old Testament. While the Children of Israel were in the desert on their way to the Promised Land, God gave directions through Moses to build a special tent for him to dwell in. We know it as the Tabernacle. The purpose of the Tabernacle was so that God could dwell among his people, but his glory would be hidden. So what Peter is saying is that the glory is beautiful, powerful, but too much and because he is too scared to know what he's even saying, he suggests the only thing he knows that can make being in the presence of this glory possible.

Next, the cloud of God's presence- something we also often see in the Old Testament- a cloud with fire and smoke, bring terror on all those who see it, comes and the voice says "This is my Son, I love him, Listen to him!" And then, it's over. Only Jesus is there, and the disciples knew. "We should be dead. We should not have survived that encounter with God." And yet, there they were. All throughout the Scriptures, and throughout this sermon, there's a tension- what we desperately desire is that same thing that would kill us: God's glory. We desperately want to see it, enjoy it, experience it, share in it, but it would kill us because we are imperfect and sinful. How can we have it? The Father tells us: "My Son whom I love. Listen to him." How can we have life in God's perfect, deadly presence? How can we find access to his glory? Through Christ. Because after this, Jesus would climb a different mountain up to Jerusalem, and he would be shamed, condemned, hung to die, and he would cry out to the Father, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" And the same Father who had just bellowed his love for him, would now be silent and turn his back on his own Son because that is what we deserved. In order for us to be glorified, Jesus had to be humiliated, and he did it with joy. That's why Jesus did this for the disciples: He didn't want them to forget who he really was- The source of God's glory, the joy of the Old Testament believers, and their life, their door to share in nothing less than the glory of God.

One point of application I'd like to make is this: As a Christian, it is not only crucial for you to remember who Jesus really is, but to remember also who you really are. This past week, while I was wrestling with the concept of glory and how to preach on it, I was also recovering from food poisoning that kept my wife and me up last Sunday night. I'm not sure there is anything less "opposite" of glory than having food poisoning- something that literally brings you to your knees, saps your energy, brings you all sorts of pain, discomfort, and if people saw, significant shame. Yet, if you think about it, the whole life of a Christian is exactly that- inglorious. When you're lonely, it's painful and inglorious. When there's sickness, death, strife, dysfunction in your families, that's inglorious. When you're struggling with addiction, temptations, guilt, depression, anger, money problems, relationship issues, failure, that's inglorious. And in your most inglorious moments, you need to remember who you *really* are. On that mountain, Jesus not only showed what he was hiding in order to save you and me, he was also showing us what we have in store: nothing less than the praise, admiration, presence, light, beauty, and glory of God himself- that one thing we've been craving our entire lives. Each of you is destined to be so glorious, so beautiful, so praiseworthy, so admirable, so holy, that if you saw it now, you'd be blinded, terrified, and tempted to worship. That's what God has in store for you. Because of what Jesus has done, that is who you *really* are. Don't forget. Amen.