

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 9:1-13

Topic

Coming down from the mountain after Jesus was transfigured before them, His disciples have a question for Him

Title

"They'll Be Questioning Down the Mountain When They Come"

Introduction

There are any number of apps, or websites, where you can upload a photo of yourself and see how you will look as you age.

It's mostly for fun, but it's also being used by health professionals to inspire lifestyle behavioral changes.

One company advertises that they can add the effects of obesity, smoking, drinking excessively, drug use, and even sun exposure. Their research suggests that if you see how wasted you're going to look because of them, you'll give up your bad habits.

It's not all vanity to focus on what you are going to look like in the future. If you are a Christian, *it should be a daily practice.*

We're told, by the apostle John in his first letter, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (3:2).

John encourages us to think about what we will eventually look like. We will look like Jesus.

Seeing ourselves as we will be in the future encourages us to a more spiritually healthy lifestyle in the present. John puts it this way: "everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (3:3).

The answer to aging isn't Botox, but being born-again, and being raised, or raptured, with a glorious new body that is outfitted for life in eternity with Jesus.

In our text, three of Jesus' disciples accompany Him up a mountain, and they witness Him being transfigured before them. They see Jesus as He will look in the future, and for eternity.

It gave them a glimpse at their own futures.

We, too, can see our future in the transfiguration of Jesus.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Seeing Jesus Transfigured You Realize You Are Becoming More Like Him, and #2 Seeing Jesus Transfigured You Realize You Will Be Coming Back With Him.

#1 Seeing Jesus Transfigured You Realize You Are Becoming More Like Him (v1-8)

The apostle Paul tells us we “will appear with Him in glory” (Colossians 3:3), and that awaiting us is “an eternal weight of glory” (Second Corinthians 4:16).

Jesus prayed to the Father about us, saying, “the glory that you have given me I have given to them” (John 17:22).

Theologians call this the Doctrine of Glorification. **Glorification is the future and final work of God upon Christians where He transforms our mortal physical bodies to the eternal physical bodies in which we will dwell forever.**

We are guaranteed glorified bodies because Jesus rose from the dead in His glorified body. He is called the "first fruits" of the resurrection. First Corinthians 15:20 states it: "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the **first fruits** of those who are asleep."

He is the first fruits, and we will follow. His resurrection is the promise and guarantee of our future resurrection, in glorified bodies.

It's one thing to say it, and quite another to see it. Some of Jesus' guys saw it, and we're going to see what they saw.

Mar 9:1 And He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power."

Chapter eight of Mark's Gospel marked a turning point in the Lord's ministry. Knowing that the national leaders of Israel would reject Him and His offer of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, Jesus began predicting that He would suffer at their hands, be crucified, but rise from the dead.

The earthly kingdom promised the Jews in their Scriptures would be delayed. It would come, but not in the lifetimes of Jesus' first followers.

His words in verse one are a promise that a few of His first followers would get a sneak-peak, a preview, of the coming Kingdom.

We can liken it to movie trailers. To me, the trailers are often the best part of going to the theater. If there aren't at least four, I'm disappointed. I've mentioned this before, that some people buy a ticket to a movie they don't necessarily want to watch simply because a particular trailer is going to precede it.

(The most recent example would be the latest *Star Wars* film. Fans went to the theater in huge numbers to see the trailers).

Jesus may as well have said, "Coming to a mountain near you: A scene from the future, coming Kingdom."

Mar 9:2 Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them.

There seem to have been groupings of threes within the twelve disciples of Jesus. Peter, James, and John seem to have been privileged to be with Jesus on special occasions.

They were the three who witnessed the Lord raise a little girl from the dead. Now here they were, with Him as He was transfigured.

Jesus did not play favorites; and it's clear these three were not necessarily the most devout, or spiritual. At least one commentator suggested that these three were the most likely to cause trouble, so Jesus had to keep close watch on them.

So what do we make of this grouping? Only that we ought to focus on our own submission to, and service to, the Lord, and not concern ourselves with how He is using others.

The "high mountain" is believed to be Mount Hermon. It's over nine-thousand feet above sea level, and eleven-thousand feet above the valley floor, which is below sea level.

As an aside, it seems Jesus was quite the avid climber. Several times, at key spiritual moments, He is up a mountain. The devil, you might recall, took Jesus to a high mountain during the wilderness temptations. We talk of the Sermon on the Mount; and the Olivet Discourse is so-called because it was delivered on the Mount of Olives.

The word "transfigured" is where we get our word *metamorphosis*. I can't help but think bullfrogs and butterflies.

Let me say something as clearly as I know how before we discuss the transfiguration. Jesus was fully God, from eternity. When He came to earth, He added to His deity His humanity, and was fully God *and* fully human.

When He rose from the dead, He did so in a glorified human body. He will remain the God-man, in that body, for eternity.

What, then, did the disciples see when Jesus was transfigured? They saw Jesus as He will appear in the future, after His resurrection, for eternity. They saw Him as the first fruits of those who would be raised from the dead.

They saw what John would later see on the Island of Patmos - the risen Jesus Christ, described in great detail in chapter one of the Revelation.

Remember, too, that what they saw was the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that "some standing here... will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power." Jesus said they'd see something of the Kingdom revealed; a preview of what was coming.

They saw Jesus as He will appear when He returns to earth in power and glory to establish and rule the Kingdom, as the forever glorified God-man.

Mar 9:3 His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them.

The idea here is that, though clothed and in a real human body, the glory came from within.

In the Marvel film, *AntMan*, the hero has a suit that allows him to shrink in size, possess superhuman strength, and control an army of ants.

Jesus wasn't an ordinary human with a super-human costume. No, He was, and is, God in human flesh, and, in the future, we'll see Him just as He is.

Mar 9:4 And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus.

This just gets better-and-better. This is like being at a concert with surprise special guests that blow your socks off.

The disciples had never seen Elijah, or Moses; no pictures existed. They knew, however, who these guys were. It's one of the reasons we can say, with confidence, that you will know your loved ones in Heaven, along with everyone else - even if you've never met them.

We could spend weeks talking about Elijah and Moses. I'm going to give you a couple of details that make sense in the context of the episode at hand.

First, we know, from the Revelation of Jesus Christ, that two very powerful witnesses will be on the earth during the first three-and-one-half years of the Tribulation. We think they are Elijah and Moses, partly because of the powers that they exhibit during that time. The two witnesses are said to "have power [for three-and-one-half years] to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire" (11:6).

- Who, in the Old Testament, stopped the rain for three-and-one-half years? That would be Elijah.
- Who, in the Old Testament, turned water into blood, and struck the earth with plagues? That would be Moses.

It makes sense that Elijah and Moses would appear with Jesus, in light of what we know about the future.

Elijah is famous for being taken to Heaven in a chariot of fire, without dying. Moses, on the other hand, died, but then something curious occurred. Satan wanted his dead body, but God dispatched the archangel, Michael, to dispute with the devil, and to preserve Moses' body.

Putting that together, you've got a person whose body was preserved, but is now raised to be with Jesus in this Kingdom preview; and you've got another person who was raptured to be with Jesus in this Kingdom preview.

That's what is going to happen to us, to the church:

- Some among us will die, but like Moses, our bodies will be preserved, in the sense that God will raise us from the dead.
- Some will not die, but will be alive when Jesus returns to resurrect the church. We will be raptured - like Elijah.

This resurrection and rapture precede the Tribulation. At the Tribulation's end, we will return with Jesus - He in His glorified body, we in ours - just like the disciples saw, represented by Jesus, Elijah, and Moses.

Mar 9:5 Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "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" -

Mar 9:6 because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid.

What should you say when you don't know what to say? Nothing!

Why "three tabernacles?" It was around the time of the Feast of Tabernacles - the time of year when Jews made structures to spend time outdoors commemorating the temporary structures the children of Israel had during their time in the wilderness.

There was a common belief that the Messiah would return to establish the Kingdom during the Feast of Tabernacles. So it's not so far-fetched to suggest the building of three tabernacles.

Peter must have thought this was it - the time Jesus revealed Himself, and set things up, with the help of these two heroes of old. He wasn't thinking preview, or coming attraction. On with the show, this is it!

Mar 9:7 And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!"

O, man! Now God the Father was in the house!! Talk about special guest stars, or cameo appearances - this tops them all.

You could call it the Father of all cameos.

Surely the Kingdom had come.

Mar 9:8 Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves.

Instead of *Back to the Future*, they were back in the present. The Kingdom was on hold - like a movie whose release date was far in the future.

The day was April 7, 2000 and New Line Cinema released a 100 second trailer teasing *The Lord of the Rings*. The first film would not be released until December 19 of 2001 - more than a year later.

The disciples must wait for the Kingdom; they are still waiting.

But they had seen the future glory of the Lord and, as John would point out - we quoted it already - "when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." It changed them.

You can't see Jesus as He is, in His glory, and not be changed.

Speaking of being changed... this word for transfiguration, used of Jesus, is only used two other times in the New Testament, and when it is, ***it is used of us.***

Rom 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

Rom 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

2Co 3:18 But 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.

The "mirror" in which we behold Jesus is the Bible. As we behold Him as He is revealed on its pages, we are being changed, moment-by-moment and day-by-day, into His image. He Who began this work in us will continue it until we are resurrected or raptured, and we are where He is, and like He is.

Your outward man is perishing. All the healthy habits in the world won't keep you from gray hair and wrinkles.

But your inward man - he is being renewed every day as you spend time with the Lord.

Instead of seeing your face in the future using some app, concentrate on seeing Jesus, in the Word. Put your spiritual health and habits first.

#2 Seeing Jesus Transfigured You Realize You Will Be Coming Back With Him

(v9-13)

I'm sure that the boys couldn't wait to get down the mountain, to tell the nine what they had just experienced. Alas, it was not to be - not yet, anyway.

Mar 9:9 Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Another gag order!? Come on; really?

These guys - and the nine left behind - would not fully comprehend the significance of the transfiguration until after Jesus rose from the dead.

(Judas, of course, would by then have committed suicide, and the eleven would choose Mathias to bring their number back to twelve).

Any talk of the transfiguration would only further confuse them about Jesus first going to the Cross, and about the Kingdom being delayed.

The Kingdom of Heaven on earth was heavily ingrained in them. Not just a spiritual kingdom that describes the overall rule of God. No, they were looking for a brick-and-mortar kingdom, ruled from Jerusalem, from the throne of King David.

Mar 9:10 So they kept this word to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant.

They obeyed. Good for them. This would have been a tough secret to keep.

Jews believed in an afterlife, and in a resurrection from the dead. Most Jews, anyway, including the Pharisees.

At the death of Lazarus, when Jesus came to his tomb, He said to Martha, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

She was describing her hope - the Jewish hope - in a general resurrection of all the elect at the end of time.

We know a whole lot more about resurrection than the Jews did.

We know that there will not be one general resurrection, but there will be two resurrections - one for believers; and one for all nonbelievers throughout human history.

We know that the resurrection of nonbelievers is a single event in time. It will occur at the end of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, when the dead from all human history are raised to stand before the judgment of the Great White Throne of God, to be found dead in their trespasses and sins, having rejected the Gospel. They will be cast into eternal conscious torment in the Lake of Fire.

We know that the resurrection of believers has already started, and continues over a period of time. It is *not* a single event, and this sometimes confuses us.

The resurrection of believers started when Jesus rose from the dead, as first fruits. According to the Gospel of Matthew, a few saints were raised with Him.

The resurrection of believers will continue with the raising of church age believers, then the rapture of living believers.

Eventually the Old Testament saints will be raised, and Tribulation martyrs, and those who live through the Kingdom of Heaven on the earth - until all believers are safe in their glorified bodies, in Heaven.

But, again we note - the resurrection of believers takes place over time, in several stages.

Let's cut Peter, James, and John a lot of slack. They had an extremely limited understanding of the resurrection.

They did have one burning question:

Mar 9:11 And they asked Him, saying, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

The Scribes said this, accurately, by the way, because of the last two verses of the Old Testament:

Mal 4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

Mal 4:6 And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.

Think, first, about what their question implied. They were confused as to why Elijah had not already come, *which implies that they absolutely believed Jesus was their Messiah.*

Since Messiah was here, where was Elijah? His brief appearance on Mount Hermon didn't seem enough to fulfill the prophecy.

Mar 9:12 Then He answered and told them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and restores all things. And how is it written concerning the Son of Man, that He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt?"

Let's take this one phrase at a time. "Elijah is coming first and restores all things." Jesus read, and understood, Bible prophecy literally. Elijah - the same Elijah we read about in the Bible, and who was recently on the Mount of Transfiguration - is going to return to the earth, as a forerunner of the Messiah.

We know exactly what this means, because we read about the two witnesses in the Revelation. One of them must be Elijah, who precedes the return of Jesus in His Second Coming.

The reason the disciples were confused was because they did not expect the death and resurrection of Jesus, nor His ascension into Heaven, nor the church age - all preceding a Second Coming.

Next Jesus says, "How is it written concerning the Son of Man," and that is a question. In other words, He was asking them, "Have you read anything about the Messiah suffering?"

He was pointing out that there were prophecies they were overlooking.

They had the kingdom prophecies memorized. But there were a whole category of prophecies they were ignoring. The idea of a suffering Servant was not on their radar. That which makes perfect sense to us, because we have the whole counsel of God, made no sense to them.

Mar 9:13 But I say to you that Elijah has also come, and they did to him whatever they wished, as it is written of him."

The other Gospels spell out plainly that Jesus was referring to John the Baptist. John had come in the spirit and the power of Elijah. He was the forerunner of the Messiah - Jesus. His ministry of preaching repentance had as its goal to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.

John even dressed like Elijah, wearing a camel's skin mantle. If the national leaders of Israel had received Jesus, they would have received John, and he would have been the fulfillment of the prophecy in Malachi.

They did not. They killed John. They would likewise kill Jesus.

The transfiguration is packed with truth that the disciples would have to wait to discover, and to understand.

It would all come together for them after the Day of Pentecost, with the coming upon them of the Holy Spirit.

When **we** look at the transfiguration, we understand it was a preview of the Second Coming, and that when Jesus returns to the earth, we're coming with Him.

We are *becoming* like Jesus; we will *be coming* back with Him.

If that's not the most exciting preview you've ever heard, I don't know what is!