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Sermon Summary #24

Transfigured! Or, A Preview of Coming Attractions Mark 9:1-13; 2 Peter 1:16-21

Have you ever noticed how many **bland and meaningless clichés** we use every day when we greet one another or say good-bye? Most of them are **harmless**, but an equal number are **downright irritating**. For example, I have in mind things like: “Hi! How are you doing?”, when in fact the person who greets you with those words probably **couldn’t care less how you’re doing and is more than mildly terrified that you might even answer them with a long and drawn out sob story that will occupy the next several hours of their already busy day!** Saying good-bye can be just as bad. We hear and say things like: “Keep in touch,” while secretly hoping that they’ll do no such thing, or “We’ll get together for lunch sometime soon,” praying all the while that they won’t take you seriously. And then there is the ever-present, “Have a nice day!”

Not everyone in every age parted company like that. When Christians in the first century said good-bye they uttered one word, one that was full of meaning, a word that gave expression to their heart-felt and deepest desires. That word was, “**Maranatha!**” It simply means, “Our Lord comes.” Or it may even be a prayer, “Come, Lord!”

I seriously doubt if “Maranatha” ever degenerated into a meaningless courtesy along the lines of our “Have a nice day.” The reason is that **for believers in the first century the promise and prospect of the second coming of Christ was a vital part of their daily existence**. They lived in constant expectation and anticipation of Christ’s return, and their parting words to fellow believers reflected that.

Even nature itself, the physical creation, in a sense is looking forward to the day when Jesus will return and consummate his work of redemption? In **Romans 8:19** Paul tells us that “the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.” The Phillips translation puts it this way: “The whole creation is on **tiptoe** to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own.” In some mysterious and unexplained way, says Paul, the flowers and rivers and valleys and mountains and stars of the sky all wait in eager expectation for the glory to be revealed when Jesus comes back.

OK, **but what does that have to do with the passage we just read about Jesus being transfigured** in the presence of Moses, Elijah, and his inner circle of disciples, Peter, James, and John?

The fact of the matter is, **the transfiguration is primarily about the second coming of Jesus**. Above everything else it is designed to provide for us **a brief, momentary glimpse at the glory of Jesus Christ that will be revealed when he returns**. The transfiguration of Jesus is a **sneak peek**, as it were, not only of the true nature of Christ as Son of God but also of that majesty and power and glory that will be fully revealed for all to see on the day when he comes back for his bride, the church. This, then, is an **advance glance** into the future. It is a momentary, but very real manifestation, of the glory and splendor and majesty and power that will envelop and surround and characterize Jesus when he comes back.

I think the best way to proceed is much in the way a good **detective** undertakes an investigation. We’re going to ask and answer **the five W’s: When? Where? Who? What? Why?**

But before we even do that, something needs to be said about **v. 1** and how it relates to vv. 2-13.

Here Jesus declares that *some* of those standing with him will personally witness or see with their own eyes the arrival of the kingdom of God in power. To what does this refer? Those who mock the Christian faith and reject its supernatural character insist that Jesus was talking about his second coming in v. 1. Jesus fully expected to return to earth during the lifetime of his disciples, but didn’t. Since all those with him died before he returned, **Jesus was**

obviously wrong and therefore Jesus is obviously not God. But there is no reason to think that he had in mind his second coming. What, then, did he mean? Options:

(1) The cross and all the events associated with it? (2) The resurrection of Jesus from the dead? (3) The descent of the Spirit at Pentecost and birth of the church? (4) The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d., when Jesus was visibly vindicated as Lord and King? All these events were truly manifestations of the kingdom of God coming in power. However, all of those standing with Jesus, not just “some” (with the exception of Judas Iscariot), were eye-witnesses of the resurrection and descent of the Spirit at Pentecost.

The answer to our question, I believe, is found **in the obvious connection between the statement of 9:1 and the events that follow immediately in 9:2-13.** In fact, only six days transpire between Jesus’ declaration in 9:1 and the events of 9:2-13. Thus it would appear **that the primary reference of v. 1 is to the transfiguration of Jesus described in vv. 2ff.** This is confirmed by the fact that *only three* saw it: Peter, James, and John.

It is undeniably strange for Jesus to declare that “some standing here will by no means taste death until” they see something that in fact occurred a mere six days later. But this misses the significance of the word “**some**”. His point is that **only some** of the disciples would witness this event while the rest would indeed “taste death” without seeing anything comparable to it. So, whereas we can’t rule out that Jesus also had in mind the manifestation of the kingdom in his death, resurrection, ascension, Pentecost, and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d., the primary event in mind is the transfiguration.

Why does Jesus speak this way? If Jesus means, “some of you will see” the kingdom, why does he use the cumbersome and awkward words, “some standing here will not taste death until they see the kingdom”? Most likely, the reference to “not dying until” harkens back to the end of chapter 8. There Jesus said that if you follow him you must be willing to take up your cross and perhaps even “die.” Following Jesus may well cost you everything. His point in 9:1, then, is that for some of them there will be something to look forward to before that death comes. For some of them, the opportunity will be afforded to witness the kingdom of God with power **before** they suffer the ultimate sacrifice of death in the cause of Christ.

Note carefully the language of 9:1. Jesus does not say they will witness the “coming” of the kingdom. He says they will see the kingdom “after it **has** come with power”. The kingdom, we know from Mark’s gospel, is **already a present reality**. It has appeared in the person of Jesus. **But some will behold its visible presence in great power.** The contrast in view here is between the secret presence of the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus and its open and powerful manifestation. Some will be privileged to see the latter.

When? “Six days later” . . . In Luke’s gospel (9:28) we are told that the reason for the move to the mountaintop was so that they might “**pray**” (undoubtedly about his impending suffering and death; for strength, encouragement, etc.).

Where? All that is said is that it was a “high mountain” (v. 2). Which mountain? Mt. Tabor? Mt. Hermon? Mt. Miron? What is important is that it was on a “mountain”.

Significant events that took place on a mountain: Jesus prays (Mark 6:46), preaches (3:13), performs miracles (Matt. 15:29), is tempted (Matt. 4:8), calls his disciples (Mark 3:13), sends them into mission (Matt. 28:16), and is crucified (11:1; 14:32; 15:22).

Who? Jesus took with him his **inner circle**, his closest friends among the disciples: Peter, James, and John. Also present were **Moses and Elijah**.

How did the disciples know who they were? We are told in v. 7 that “**a cloud overshadowed them**”. Luke says that they actually “entered” the cloud. See Exod. 24:15-16. It “enveloped” or “overshadowed” them; used in LXX in Ex. 40:35 and 1 Kings 8:10-11. See also Luke 1:35. “The cloud is the impregnating presence of God, symbolizing that in Jesus, even more than in the tabernacle of old, God dwells bodily with humanity” (James Edwards, 267). The point is that this is **symbolic of the presence of God**. It is a **highly charged revelatory moment** when God himself speaks audibly. I can only conclude that they were instinctively made aware by the Spirit who these men were. It

was a **revelatory experience** not unlike what Peter experienced back in chapter 8 when God made known to him that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

But why Moses and Elijah? First, these two men, together with Enoch, were thought of as the “deathless” ones of the OT. Elijah had been translated directly to heaven and Moses mysteriously disappeared on Mt. Nebo and had no known gravesite. In other words, they had disappeared from view rather than dying in the ordinary way. Stories developed about their being somehow spared physical death. Perhaps Mark is pointing to the fact that **Jesus, although certainly not spared death, in his own unique way would overcome the power of death.** Second, and more important still is the fact that **Moses and Elijah were representative of the entire prophetic tradition in the OT that was designed to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. READ Deut. 18:15.** Moses was himself the prototype of the eschatological prophet.

“The presence of Moses and Elijah thus signifies that Jesus is not a ‘walk on’ in the divine economy, nor is his revelation as the Son of God (v. 7) an anomaly or arbitrary expression of the divine will. Rather, the presence of Moses and Elijah as forerunners attests to the culmination of a purposeful revelation of God’s Son with the history of Israel” (Edwards, 266).

However, although M and E appear with Jesus, **they don’t remain with him.** They vanish. Their presence points to Jesus. Their work is consummately fulfilled in him. The time has come for them to step aside and for all eyes and ears to be fixed on Jesus, the fulfillment of all OT hopes and prophetic promises.

What? What actually happened on the mountain? “He was *transfigured* before them” (v. 2). Matthew and Luke both say that **“his face shone like the sun”** (Mt. 17:2), whereas Mark emphasizes how this was reflected in his **garments.** “They became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them” (v. 3). This isn’t the same thing that happened to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Moses is said to have descended the mountain with a radiant glow in his face. But the shining in Moses’ face as he descended the mountain was a *reflection* of the glory he beheld, whereas the shining of Jesus’ face was because of his own intrinsic majesty and deity.

“Transfigured” occurs only 4 times in NT – Mark 9:2; Matt. 17:2; **Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18.**

There was **no substantive change in the nature of Jesus.** He didn’t become something other than what he truly and already was. Rather, there was an *outward visible change* or transformation in his **appearance** that reflected his true nature. It was a “revelation” as much as a transformation. His true inner identity and character as Son of God incarnate suddenly burst forth for others to see. The divine glory within irradiated Christ’s whole being, affecting even his clothes! What Peter, James, and John were privileged to see was **the eternal, pre-incarnate glory of the Son that for the period of his earthly life had been deliberately obscured and hidden behind the veil of his human flesh. The veil of finite human nature is momentarily lifted to provide a glimpse of his infinite deity!** There is a sense in which his human flesh became momentarily translucent and the light of his divine nature shone through. But as I said earlier, this glory on display was not only to remind them of Christ’s past but also to point them to his future. They were allowed to see in part what all of us will see in fullness at his return.

Observe Peter’s impetuous and once again ill-advised response . . . God the Father speaks from heaven and says, in effect, **“Peter, shut up! This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!”**

“He is all you need. He is the consummation of the revelation of who I am and what I want. If you want to know anything about me, look at him, listen to him. Peter, if he says he’s going to Jerusalem to suffer and die, don’t you dare stand in his way. Pay heed to his will and his words. If he tells you to deny yourself and take up your cross, do it! Peter, everything Moses has written and all Elijah has done, together with everyone else in the OT, only makes sense when seen in the light of who Jesus is and what he does and says.”

Given the supernatural and stunning nature of what they had just witnessed, it must have been incredibly difficult for them to keep their mouths shut about it. But Jesus didn’t want anyone attempting once again to come and make him king based on the report of his divine glory. Their confusion regarding the meaning of “resurrection” is understandable. Let’s not forget that they just witnessed an unprecedented display of divine power and glory and the coming of God’s kingdom. How in the world could “death” and crucifixion have factored into that? **They simply**

couldn't grasp how this one whom they've just seen in majestic display could ever die. What need would there be of a resurrection?

Why? Why did this happen? What are we to learn from it?

(1) The majesty and glory displayed in the transfiguration are designed to encourage us as we willingly deny ourselves and take up our cross and embrace every sacrifice in following Christ. Whatever we endure in following him is more than worth it.

(2) The majesty and glory displayed in the transfiguration are designed to remind us that in Jesus we have a reliable guide in life ("hear him; listen to him"; he can be trusted).

(3) The majesty and glory displayed in the transfiguration are designed to remind us that he is God!

(4) But most important of all, the majesty, glory, and power displayed in the transfiguration are designed to provide us with a glimpse at what will happen at Christ's second coming and to intensify our expectation and our joyful anticipation of that coming of Christ in glory and power. See 2 Peter 1:16-21 . . .

When Peter speaks of the "power and coming" of Christ he means the "powerful coming" of Christ, a reference to his second coming at the close of history. Evidently the false teachers were attacking and seeking to undermine Christian truth, especially the hope we have of Christ's return, referring to it as a fable. Peter tells us that our confidence in that coming is based not on cleverly devised myths, it is not an old wives tale, it is not a fable or religious fiction; rather we know it to be true because of the eyewitness experience of the disciples who were with Jesus on the holy mountain!

Peter's words cannot be mistaken: The eyewitness experience of Jesus' transfiguration was a preview of the glory of the second coming of Christ.

So, *why* was Jesus transfigured on the mountain in the presence of these three disciples? Simply in order that they might in turn tell us of the **absolutely inviolable certainty** of the second coming of Christ in glory. At his first coming his glory was veiled. He came in weakness and humility and was subject to scorn and rejection and eventually crucifixion. But not the second coming!

Don't be discouraged by the corruption in our world. Don't ever think that pagan society and sexual immorality and atheistic arrogance and poverty will have the final word. Don't put your trust in a political party or person with the idea that he/she/it will make all things right. A day is coming, says Peter, and we have seen the preview, we have witnessed with our own eyes, in advance, what that day will be like, and I assure you, says Peter,

That when he comes it will not be with a white flag declaring a truce, but with a sharp, two-edged sword to destroy his enemies.

When he comes a second time it will not be with overtures of peace and reconciliation to those who have rejected him and mocked his name but in flaming fire dealing our eternal retribution.

When he comes a second time it will not be with the fanfare of new hope for mankind, but in righteousness displayed for his people, for believers, and wrath for those who do not bow the knee in submission to his Lordship.

When he comes a second time it will not be to discuss or debate concerning what is right and wrong. He is coming to judge and eradicate evil from the new earth on which he and we will dwell forever!

Do you wish to know what will happen at the second coming, unlike what happened at the first? Then hear the apostle Paul in **2 Thessalonians 1:7-10** . . .

So what? See **1 John 3:1-3** . . .