

A VISUAL AND AUDITORY REMINDER OF CHRIST

The whole life of Jesus was ministry. The whole life of Christ was about revealing the heart of God, the desires of God, the way God loves and serves and sacrifices and dedicates himself towards his people. And we see that in various different ways. We see that in the way he pulls in the hurting, how he takes in the stranger, how he calls down and out the thief, how he raises the dead, heals the sick, gives sight to the blind – you name it...Jesus did it. That was all part of the not only his ministry but the whole reason he comes. And as we read throughout the Gospels the disciples, time after time, simply did not understand what this meant. They don't know why he heals this person, they don't get why the person was sick in the first place, they don't know why or even how he feeds that many people or why he talks with that person and not that person and it's because they simply don't get it. It's not that they don't want to know or learn...it's just that this is all foreign to them.

And now...in Mark 9:2-9 we have this massive event happen that should be plainly clear to the disciples and yet even now they simply don't get it.

Jesus takes John, Peter, and James with him and they ascend upon what is most likely Mount Hermon and we don't read why these three and nobody else – there are assumptions but we'll let those be...and so they climb this mountain and they're all alone. And just like that Jesus was “transfigured” before them.” This word “transfigure” means a metamorphosis or a change from one thing to another and not simply in appearance either – it's a complete change. And so instantly, before their eyes, Jesus changes – but Mark doesn't tell us exactly how. It's simply something we're left to ponder and for whatever reason Mark simply doesn't feel he needs to describe what that change looks like. To him, and his readers, “transfigured” is simply enough said.

And so in this change Jesus' clothes change too and become more than dazzling white – they become the whitest white you have ever seen! A white that the strongest bleach couldn't even produce – and a color not even used anywhere else. Author Alan Cole writes that white was simply an unusual color in ancient Palestine because it was impractical. It got too dirty too easily so nobody would use it for clothing. Nobody wants to walk around always looking filthy – always looking like Pigpen from Charlie Brown – and so you dye and create clothes that you can wear more than a minute after being outside. Having to do laundry back then is already tough – don't make it harder on

yourself by having clothes that have to be washed after you simply go outside to get the mail!

But more so, white is the symbol and color of purity.

But Jesus' change isn't the only event that takes place here...Moses and Elijah instantly show up and talk with Jesus. Moses, the man who represented the Law and was Israel's deliverer is talking with Elijah the prophet and defender of God – the one who worked tirelessly for people to turn to God and worship him via his prophetic voice – the one who was and is seen as the “restorer” of all things and these two guys are talking with Jesus...and then in the midst of this (and whatever is being said)...Peter speaks.

Of course he does. We can always count on Peter. Peter, James and John at this point are simply jaw-dropped with amazement. They haven't uttered a word and it is in this moment of uncertainty, confusion that Peter decides to declare that this is “good.” This is not only good to see but it is really good that we're here too. “With the six of us...you know what? You all need a shelter!”

A shelter! Really Peter? Are we going camping?

I love Peter...and while he does a lot of things that we are unsure of there simply is something about him that draws ME to him. Why does he speak so frequently and quickly? Why does he disown Christ in his very moment of need and yet continuously follows him as he watches him being beaten? Disowning him and yet drawing ever closer with each strike against Christ's back and face?

Peter is an enigma to us, he's puzzling in many ways and difficult to understand – and yet how many of us find ourselves in Peter-type situations?

Peter simply didn't understand. We see that not only in the way he speaks to Jesus by calling him “Rabbi” or “teacher”, and he DEFINITELY didn't understand because building a shelter would mean that they should be there LONGER. (“*Let's camp for the whole week!*”) But MOST IMPORTANTLY Peter's words, his desire to build a shelter declares that these three men, these three powerhouses were of equal importance. He knows how powerful and big Elijah and Moses are...and so his words lift up Jesus unto them – which is completely wrong. If Peter could put words to the conversation between Christ, Moses, and Elijah – he would assume that Jesus would be saying, “Wow...I can't

believe I'm with you two!" When in reality, it would be Moses and Elijah in awe and amazement for being in the presence of Christ. Which is why the voice of God appears as this cloud surrounds them. And out of that cloud, in the midst of it and yet fully coming from somewhere else... they hear the voice of God saying, "*This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!*"

Do those words sound familiar at all? They should...this now is the second time we've heard the voice of God speaking to and about his Son. One author writes that this is the "unqualified endorsement" of Jesus from the Father. Words that we heard originally at his baptism. "*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*" (**Mark 1:11**) These words not only become affirmation to Peter, James, and John, they not only declare who Christ fully is but there is no dispute now how important he is, his relationship to the Father, and the fact that no other person is of equal importance. Moses...you were good....Elijah...you were good too – but you two don't hold weight when standing next to Jesus.

The closing words of God was what propelled me this week. "*Listen to him!*" That seems slightly odd to me. I could understand God saying, "*This is my Son, whom I love – and he comes to redeem and set you free. And so his journey will take him to the cross where he will die...listen to his words for they are the truth.*" That...to me...is crystal clear! Why couldn't God say THOSE words or something similar? What does "listen to him" even mean? Because after that the cloud dissipates and the voice is gone...and they all leave. It's as if all that happens...then the 4 of them look around and Jesus says, "*Welp...time to go!*"

"*Listen to him*" – is not cryptic by any means. It means exactly what it says and how it sounds. Listen to what he has to say, drink them in, write them on your hearts and sleeves – be obedient, pay attention – receive the information you are getting and understand it. Understand HIM. Follow his words, heed his advice (which really isn't advice it's really more of a command)... and even "*don't argue with him because he knows what he's doing.*"

The words of God, to me, are challenging in that I don't think all of this that happened was about Jesus. I mean, it's ALL about Jesus but I think this moment, seeing Moses and Elijah, experiencing the cloud and the voice of God and the change of Christ was not about Christ – but it was about Peter, James, and John. Jesus knew who he was, he knew the journey he was on, the reason why he comes, the truth of who he is as the Son of

God. He didn't need this temporary change to affirm *that* path or *reaffirm* that he was, and is, the Son of God. He knew all those things and knew them well.

His mission was fully understood...by him. But the other three...that was a whole different story. It almost makes you wonder how much this then became a "transfiguration" to those three who saw it, maybe didn't understand it...were told not to speak of it...but drew upon it as strength, truth, and the very words that would become part of their missionary work of spreading the Gospel later on in life and ministry. I think those three needed this as affirmation on what must happen...but even more so WHO JESUS TRULY WAS. Maybe, even though they didn't get it quite yet, those three needed to really know that Christ was the exalted one in order to fully get that he had to take this path to the cross. And what we didn't read today was that Mark goes into more of the conversation that happened on the way down...and you see the disciples interacting with Jesus and asking questions...trying to process what they saw, what they heard from God and seen from Jesus in the past as well as from other people...what they know and question themselves. Again, to me...this mountain-top transfiguration while it was honoring to Christ...it was necessary for his followers. Necessary for their own understanding of Christ's nature, necessary for their own work-through of what God is doing, but truly necessary for them to understand what lies ahead for them as well – and most definitely necessary for them to hold on to and remember and keep as an internal strength as they begin their journey too (something we see replayed in conversation in **2 Peter 1:16-18**) as proclaimers of the risen Messiah.

If you still have your Bibles open you can see that just before the start of chapter 9 we have Christ speaking of his death and the way of the cross. We have Jesus' very words saying that "*whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up THEIR cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.*" (**Mark 8:34-35**). And what was Peter's response after that proclamation? What does Peter do? He takes Jesus aside and rebukes him! He treats him as his inferior, as his pupil and chastises him. And Christ's response to this was to call out Peter and refer to him as Satan!

Now take that incident...those words from Jesus before Peter's chastising...and put in God's words as they were surrounded by the cloud: "*Listen to him.*" Heed the words of Christ. Follow his *directions* and *direction*. Take the path he sets out, obey his commands.

This is who Christ *is* and *was* whether they wanted it, were ready for it, or even understood it.

“Listen to him”, are the words of God concerning his Son and pointed directly to his followers...they not only are a clear affirmation of the holiness, purity, and deity of Christ – but they are directions and commands that speak to the fact that there needed to be a clear reminder of who Jesus is and that all he has ever said, will say, did, and will do...and also declare his work and love for his people. Sometimes...the followers of Christ need a reminder of who he truly is and what he commands.

“Listen to him!” Maybe that means you, right now, are going through something where you simply need to be reminded to “listen” because you haven’t been. Maybe you’re fighting the Holy Spirit in some aspect... be it work, family, relationships, personal...and you’re fighting God on what he’s telling you plainly to do, or be, or go, or say. Listen to him!

Maybe you simply need the reminder to *listen*. You’re so confused on what to do and there’s so much noise going on in your life and your not centered and QUIET. Maybe it means you do less so you can do more.

Maybe it’s something else. Maybe you simply need the reminder of who truly Christ was. I mean we know who he is. I don’t think any of us need a reminder that he is the Lord of lords, the King of kings, the Messiah, the Son of God – we got that down. But what we NEED are reminders, nudges, and even convictions from time to time on what that LOOKS like – and there...I think is the truth of all of it – the whole point of the transfiguration.

They, us, we need reminders that Christ served first... and he served without the request of *return* service. We need reminders that he loved abundantly regardless of who the person was, where they’ve been, where they come from, or even where they are going. The widow, the orphan, the lame, the diseased, the outcast, the forgotten, the homeless, the refugee, the murderer, the one caught up in scandals, the one caught up in adultery – the one sitting in prison already... all of *them*...and then you and me that fit all of those categories because of what we have done too. We need reminders of what sacrificial love looks like and feels like when it is given AND received. We need reminders that the path of the cross may mean that we will suffer too...but when it happens... when it occurs... the way of the cross doesn't end at the cross. It doesn't end at the tomb with a boulder rolled

in front blocking both the way in and the way out...that may be where we deserve to go but that isn't the end. Grace declares that it ends, that the path stops just beyond the grave. And truth be told...it actually doesn't even end at all! Right? Because beyond that, beyond that cross, beyond death, beyond the grave is the radiating glory of life everlasting.

And guess what...Christ declares those things too. Listen to him. Listen to his words of love and service but don't forget to listen to his words of grace and forgiveness and eternal life. Don't get hung on one while forgetting about the other.

All of that, and so so much more, are reminders to you and I, John, Peter, James...that every aspect of Christ's life we too will walk. In his sufferings...in his love...in his sacrifices for us and each other...in his death...but in his resurrection as well.

Let's pray.