

## Glimpses of Glory

**Text:** Mark 9:2-13 (Readings: Isaiah 42: 1-9; 2 Peter 1:12-21)

There are times in your life when you say...I wish I was there.  
I wish I was at the AFL grandfinal when Sydney beat Westcoast.  
I wish I was at the World Cup soccer final.  
I wish I was there to see...

When I read this passage in Mark's gospel I can't help but say...

I wish I was there.

I wish that I had witnessed this special moment with Jesus.

I wonder why Jesus chose to reveal his glory in this way in front of only a select few disciples?

I wonder if the other disciples were jealous...wishing they were there?

This transfiguration account comes at a decisive stage in Jesus earthly ministry.

It goes hand-in-hand with the confession of Peter in the preceding verses.

Until this point Mark has portrayed Jesus teaching, healing, and interacting in Galilee and the Decapolis.

Until this point in Jesus ministry the disciples have not been challenged to commit themselves to Jesus.

The question on the way to Caesarea Philippi was, 'Who do you say I am?'

And that sets the direction for the second half of Mark's gospel.

Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ was correct in name...but not in content.

Jesus radically reinterprets their messianic expectations...

The way forward is one of humiliation, suffering and death.

And now this is followed up by the transfiguration...and the two are closely linked.

Peter's confession...the disciples are taught how they should think about Jesus.

The transfiguration allows them to see his true nature.

The transfiguration falls near the middle of Mark's gospel.

Jesus takes the executive, so to speak, the inner circle of his disciples,  
and heads off for a short retreat.

Time to refocus their vision and understand the key elements of their mission.

It is a very simple retreat...save the thousands of words.

Instead Jesus reaches to the heart of his disciples with one very powerful picture.

After confusion the disciples get a visible picture of Jesus' true nature...

Which, till this point was hidden.

The message was clear...first suffering then glory.

And up on that mountain top the truth of that Word is revealed for these 3 disciples,  
the three who would be the anchors, the inner leadership team of the early church.

The layers of Christ's humanity are peeled back and the full glory of heaven breaks through.

Jesus wasn't changed on the mountain.

What's been inside of him all the while finally came bursting out on the mountain.

It's an explosion of glory that's been veiled and hidden so far in Jesus' life.

Here we learn a reality about Christ's glory.

JESUS CHRIST'S GLORY WAS HIDDEN WITHIN HIS HUMANITY SO HE COULD LIVE AS A TRUE MAN.

Now the phrase "hidden glory" seems like a contradiction in terms. If a person's glory is his or her greatness, it would seem like you'd want that glory to shine.

Why would God hide his shining spender, his bright majesty of greatness?

I mean that's the opposite of what we do. When we have a measure of glory as humans, we let it shine for everyone to see. We let our own glory and greatness shine, sometimes making it appear brighter and better than it really is.

Why would God do the opposite and hide his glory? The answer is found in God's decision to take on human form and become a real human being.

When God made the decision to enter into our world, to add to his already divine nature a human nature, he made the decision to shroud his glory in the weakness of humanity.

God did this so he could experience the frailties and weakness of being a human being. He did it because he loves us, because he's passionate about us, because he wanted to open the doors for us to know him in a way that would've been impossible had he not become a true human being.

Although Christ's glory finally broke through here, for most of his life on this earth it was hidden from view.

Standing with Jesus, suddenly, are Moses and Elijah.  
And, if nothing else, what a picture that is.  
Moses - the great Old Testament giver of the law,  
Elijah - greatest of all prophets.  
The Law and the Prophets.

It was the common way that Jews referred to the entire Old Testament - "*The Law And The Prophets.*"

Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets, standing together, conversing with Jesus...  
the one who fulfills the law and the one who fulfills the words of the prophets.  
is the one who fulfills the promises of scripture.

We can add to that view as well.  
Both Moses and Elijah were familiar with mountaintop experiences.

On Mt. Sinai Moses encountered the presence of God in a unique way when he received the ten commandments.

And on Mt. Carmel Elijah had a showdown with the pagan prophets of Baal, a showdown where God sent fire from heaven.

So both encountered God in a special way in their own mountaintop experiences.

Then a cloud comes and covers Jesus.  
Jesus is completely immersed in the heavenly glory of God, just as Moses the first law giver went up to be swallowed by the smoky cloud on the top of Mt. Sinai (Ex 24.15-18).

And out of the cloud a voice.

The shocked, now terrified disciples, lay quivering on the ground. (Matthew tells us this)

And who wouldn't?

Wouldn't you?

It all seems pretty contained and tame when we read it.

But really - try to imagine it.

When we sing songs asking to see God's glory, I sometimes wonder what we'd do if it actually happened.

I suspect we'd hit the floor, covering our faces in fear as well.

Imagine if it came here one Sunday.

Suddenly in the middle of the service, out of nowhere, there is this flashing extremely bright, blinding light that fills the whole building.

The penetrating light is everywhere.

You can only see the light.

No pastor. No congregation. Just light.

And then, out of somewhere in this enormously brilliant light a powerful voice is heard.

Can you imagine if God really showed up at Dandenong some Sunday, no holds barred, nothing held back?

What would happen to our quick talk, or stubborn opinions, or determined agendas?

What would it do?

How would it change things?

It knocked the disciples to the ground.

It even shut down motor-mouth Peter.

And then God spoke: "*This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!*"

Not just some representative of God, like Moses or Elijah.

God's Son!

Come to fulfill for humanity what Moses and Elijah had begun...what they talked about.

To live to complete perfection the will of God that had been revealed to people through Moses and the Law.

To become the representative of God to the people, and the representative of the people to God, as Elijah had done in his prophetic ministry.

The perfection, the completion - the Way, the Truth, the Life.

And of Him, God says, "*Listen to Him!*"

Carrying the same meaning as a parent telling a child, "*Now listen to me.*"

Pay attention.

Obey.

***Listen up!***

Terrifying!

Overwhelming!

That is the One we serve as Christians.

To whom we pray and sing.

Of whom we speak.

Whose name we carry.  
For whom we work.  
Not one to be taken lightly, or fooled with, or treated casually.

But whatever is to happen, Peter, James, and John share a memory of this extraordinary experience on the mountain.

In remembering this event, the bright shining light, the voice from heaven, the appearance of Moses and Elijah, they are given strength to deal with the trials ahead.  
That's why I wished I was there.

And they also have a sense of what to expect at the end.  
When they do experience Jesus in resurrected form, they will not be totally without precedent.  
We have glimpses, opportunities, mountaintop experiences.

The day before Rev. King was assassinated he delivered his final sermon in support of sanitation workers on strike in Memphis, Tennessee.

When you read that sermon from April 3, 1968 you get the uncanny feeling that Rev. King knew that his death was drawing near.

Listen to Rev. King's words from the conclusion of his final sermon:

"I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter to me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the Lord" ("I've Been to the Mountaintop" preached on 4/3/68).

Rev. King had a mountaintop experience that showed him what was to come, and that mountaintop experience filled him with peace as he faced his future.

Mountaintop experiences are like that.  
I've had a few mountaintop experiences myself.

But the problem with mountaintop experiences is that you eventually have to come down the hill.

Rev. King had to come down from his mountaintop experience and face the reality of a bullet that would take his life.

You see, after the intensity of the mountaintop, we come back to the normal routine, and the two seem to collide.  
As one person once said about coming down from the mountaintop, "After the ecstasy comes the laundry."

And it's kind of hard to get excited about the routine things of life.  
Billy Graham once said, "Mountaintops are for view and inspiration, but fruit is grown in the valleys."

Peter and the others came down and tried to live normal again...but things were different  
They had experienced something unique and special.

Why he suggests building three shelters, no one really knows.

Perhaps he wanted to make the experience last longer.

Perhaps he's using the imagery of the Hebrew Temple of Solomon's day, or the tabernacle in the desert...where the glory of the Lord rested.

Only Peter seemed to know what he meant, and the rest of us have to guess.

But I'm sure it has to do with keeping what they saw in their mind.

It has to do with not wanting to head back to reality.

And as they walk down the mountain back to the valley below, Jesus commands them to keep the experience to themselves for while.

He says that people won't understand their experience until after Jesus rises from the dead.

And they keep it to themselves, but they wonder what he means by "rising from the dead."

They also discuss the appearance of Elijah...

Recognizing that the OT said Elijah must come first.

But Jesus switches their thinking around and brings it all back to suffering...his suffering.

Here we get another picture about the reality of Christ's glory.

You see, Jesus' glory wasn't revealed most clearly on the mountain but on the cross.

Jesus forever redefined glory when he willingly endured the shame of the cross for us.

In fact, the gospel of John regularly calls Jesus' crucifixion his glorification.

What the rest of the world mocked as shameful and humiliating, Jesus saw as his finest hour, his glorification.

There are some fascinating contrasts between the mountain of transfiguration and the cross.

The glory of the transfiguration was a private glory, a glory revealed to a select few.

But the glory of the cross was a public spectacle, a public crucifixion while the world watched.

On the mountain Jesus was surrounded by two of the holiest men of Hebrew history, Moses and Elijah; but on the cross he was surrounded by two common criminals.

On the mountain Jesus' clothing shined brightly, but on the cross, Jesus was stripped of his clothing so the Roman executioners could gamble for it.

On the mountain a divine voice declares Jesus to be God's Son, but on the cross it's a Roman soldier who ironically blurts out, "Surely this man was God's Son."

Can you see the contrasts?

To live consistently with the glory on the mountain, Jesus must endure the glory of the cross.

And in that decision Jesus forever redefined glory.

What people viewed as a symbol of defeat was transformed into a symbol of victory.

Why? Because that was Christ's finest hour, the place of his glorification, the place where he paid the price and took upon himself all our failures.

Glory came through the cross, through the suffering.

And of course that's true for us as well, that the path to our own glory as God's sons and daughters is the path of suffering.

That's why Jesus told us to take up our cross when we follow him, to walk the path of abandonment to God's will that he walked.

It was that way for Jesus, and it's that way for us. In God's plan, there is no glory without suffering.

On the mountain of transfiguration Christ's glory exploded. But it was on the cross that Christ's glory was fully revealed. The glory of Jesus Christ was hidden in his humanity, affirmed by the Father, and revealed fully in the cross.

I might say, 'I wish I was there.'

But in a way I am...I can read about it and marvel

I can see it in the cross...the glory of God.

I understand it because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

We have a risen Jesus...and we will see his full glory when he returns, or calls us home.