The Transfiguration of Jesus

Mark 9:1-13

Key Verse:9: His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.”

We often hear the stories of great men in history whose lives were changed when they met someone great or experienced some supernatural power. For example, Moses met God who called him from the burning bush. Moses saw God in the fire. It became the turning point in Moses’ life. Paul the Apostle saw Jesus on the way to Damascus, who appeared as the great light which made him blind. Paul’s life dramatically changed since then. Do you have any personal experience or encounter that changed your life completely? In today’s passage Peter saw Jesus who was transfigured on a sacred mountain. The glorious transfiguration of Jesus became God’s vision for Peter. Later Peter confessed that this event remained in his heart like a shining star in the darkness of his life. (2 Pe 1:16-19) This time let us go up to the sacred mountain and see what happened at that time.

First, Jesus predicted his glory. (8:31-9:1) In 8:38 Jesus predicted his second coming. “***If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.***” A minute ago, Jesus predicted his suffering, death, and resurrection. (8:31) He also taught his disciples to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him. The disciples followed Jesus because he always taught the truth and the kingdom of God. They loved Jesus who healed the sick and raised the dead. They were happy to follow Jesus and were proud of being his disciples. We also follow Jesus as missionaries, Bible teachers, pastors, etc. We follow Jesus because we believe that following Jesus is the way of truth and blessing. But we don’t realize the cost of following Jesus. The way of Jesus is the way of cross. The way of Jesus is the way of suffering, rejection, persecution, and even crucifixion, (I mean that we crucify our sinful desires and nature on the cross.) Among us there are some who suffer from financial difficulties. Others struggle with their uncertain visa status and health issues. Still, others struggle with their children, and so on. Some students face discrimination or rejection from their ungodly friends and society. Each day seems to be the day of cross and each moment, a spiritual battle.

Look at verse 1. “After he said to them, “***Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.***” There are several interpretations about this verse. Some say that this verse indicates the second coming of Jesus. Others say, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Still, others, the Revelation of Apostle John and so on. But according to the flow of Jesus’ ministry it is better to interpret this as a prediction of Jesus’ transfiguration.

Second, Jesus was transfigured. (2-4) Look at verses 2-4. “***After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus***.” Here the high mountain is known as Mt. Hermon, located near Caesarea Philippi. On this mountain Jesus was transfigured before his three disciples, Peter, James and John. Transfiguration is ‘*metamorphoo*’ in Greek, which means to change into another form. Jesus was changed into a glorious form. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. The dazzling white reveals Jesus’ glorious and holy image of God. Hebrews 1;3 describes this, “*The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being...*” In this transfigured Jesus there was no darkness or the image of the suffering servant at all. This is a similar story to how Moses saw God in the burning bush and to Paul seeing Jesus as the great light. This transfigured Jesus is the preview of his glorious resurrection and the picture of the Son who would sit at the throne of God the Father in heaven.

When Jesus was transfigured, Moses and Elijah were also there. Moses was the representative of the laws. Elijah was the representative of the prophets. This indicates that Jesus’ transfiguration was the fulfillment of all the laws and prophets. In other words, Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testaments as the Promised Messiah. Moses and Elijah endorsed his transfiguration. Verse 4 says that they were talking with Jesus. Other gospels explain that they were talking about Jesus’ departure, which means Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Then, why was Jesus transfigured before the eyes of his disciples? This was because Jesus wanted to help them have hope in him. Jesus planted hope in their hearts by showing his glorious image as the Son of God. His disciples’ heart must have been heavy and dark when they heard about Jesus’ prediction. Peter didn’t want to listen about Jesus’ suffering and death. So, he rebuked Jesus. Not just Peter, but the other disciples also became anxious and sorrowful when they thought about their uncertain futures. What would happen to them if Jesus was not with them? How would they live without Jesus? Their life looked hopeless and uncertain. We often feel the same as they do. But Jesus wanted to change their thoughts and worries. Jesus wanted them to have hope in him. The story of Jesus will not finish with a sad ending. Jesus will be raised from the dead. There will be the glory of resurrection after his crucifixion. Our life of following Jesus is the same. Glory will follow after suffering. Paul said in Romans 8:18, “*We consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us*.”

We need the eyes to see the future glory behind present sufferings. Through the transfiguration Jesus opened the eyes of his disciples to see a glorious Jesus behind the suffering Jesus. God saw future Abraham as a father of many nations behind present Abram, a noble father. Jesus saw future Peter as a fisher of men behind the present Simon, a fisherman. Hershey saw Michael as a great spiritual leader behind her present imperfect husband. We have to see our children with the eyes of Jesus. We have to see their changed futures behind their present situation. Who knows what a young man’s future is? Mary prays for my son not only to be born again, but also be a great servant of God. Other parents do the same as she does. We have to see ourselves with the same eyes of hope.

Our God is the God of hope. He sees each of us with the eyes of hope. As we read the Bible, God always visits us with the message of hope. He did for Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Samuel, Peter, Paul, you and me, and so on. Abram was a childless old man. God took him outside and showed stars in the sky. And God promised Abraham that his descendants would become as numerous as stars in the sky. God helped Abraham to see his future behind his present.

Before Abraham became a father of many nations, he went through the tunnel of 25 years without a child. Before Moses and the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they had to live in the desert for 40 years. In the same way we are now passing through a valley of suffering on our way to the Promised Land, the kingdom of heaven. Indeed, God will make our labor in him not in vain. We are hopeful because our future glory is guaranteed. As Christ Jesus lived, so too will we live again. As Christ sat on the throne in heaven, so too will we also sit in glory. The word transfiguration (transformation) “*metamorphoo*” appears 4 times in the New Testament (Mt 17:2, Mk 9:2, Ro 12:2, 2 Co 3:18) Paul said in 2 Co 3:18 that we all will be transformed into the image of Jesus with ever increasing glory. Satan may take away our money, health, and people, but not our hope. Our hope is not a temporary hope which satisfies for a while and disappears, but it is the hope which never perishes or spoils or fades away. Peter called it the living hope which is kept in heaven for us. Paul called it the hope which never disappoints us. Because of this hope we can endure. Because of this hope we can overcome it. Because of this hope we continue. Amen!

Third, listen to him (5-13) Peter must have been greatly moved by Jesus’ transfiguration. He didn’t want to go down from the mountain and suffer again. So, he suggested Jesus. Look at verses 5-6. “***Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.***)” Peter might have wanted to live with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah forever on the mountain. Still, he did not know what he was talking about. How did God answer Peter? Verse 7 says, “***Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!***” In the Bible, a cloud is the symbol of God’s presence. God led his people in the desert by the pillar of cloud. God also appeared in the Tent of Meeting in the cloud. The voice which came from the cloud was the voice of God, who endorsed Jesus as the Son of God. Peter must listen to Jesus, not to his own words. As the disciples of Jesus, we also must listen to Jesus. Satan continues to say something which tempts us, discourages us. Satan continues to plant the seed of doubt, complaint, and anxiety in our hearts. But we must listen to Jesus. We must listen to the word of God, the promise of hope and change. Amen!

When Peter was rebuked by God, he came back to his senses. When he looked around, he no longer saw anyone except Jesus. (8) Moses and Elijah disappeared. Peter came down from the mountain with Jesus and his two other disciples. This was recorded as a one-time event in Jesus’ ministry, but it never disappeared from Peter’s heart and his memory. Jesus’ transfiguration remained in Peter’s heart like a shining star in his life. Whenever he suffered, he remembered this glorious moment. Whenever he felt his cross heavy, he remembered this glorious future. Today we learned how and why Jesus was transfigured. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus and listen to him! Let us see our children, our future with the eyes of hope, the eyes of transfiguration. Draw a picture or image of our future children and pray to God and pray for them. Amen!