

# THE GOD WE NEED

Mark 9:2-10

The Transfiguration of Our Lord (Series B)

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The Gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to Mark*, chapter 9, verses 2 through 10. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Mark 9, beginning at verse 2, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>2</sup> And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup> and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup> And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup> And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." <sup>6</sup> For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. <sup>7</sup> And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." <sup>8</sup> And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

<sup>9</sup> And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. <sup>10</sup> So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean.

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

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What do you want from God? Who do you want him to be? I'm asking you to examine your hearts here. And I'm not asking you to come up with the right answer. I'm asking you to come up with the honest answer. If you know the answer you're supposed to give, that's good. And if that right answer is also your honest answer, that's even better. If that's true for you, then you are certainly a better Christian than I am. But what we want from God and what we're supposed to want from God are usually two different things. So I'm asking you to honestly examine your sinful hearts. What do you want from God?

We should want, above all things, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and his fatherly protection. That's what we should want for ourselves. And, beyond that, we should want those things for all people. Or, to use the framework Jesus gave us in the Lord's Prayer, we should want God's Name to be hallowed, his Kingdom to come, his will to be done, daily provision, forgiveness of sins, protection from temptation, and eternal deliverance from evil. These are the things we should want from God, and these are the things he desires to give to us.

But we often want other things. Even if we know these are the things we should want, that doesn't make us want them. When I look at my own heart and the things I desire, instead of God's Name to be hallowed, I want my name to be respected. Instead of his Kingdom to come, I want to be successful. Instead of his will, I, of course, want my will to be done. That's just the nature of having a will. Instead of daily provision, I want prosperity, or at least provision for my whole life. Now, daily provision, or what Jesus calls "daily bread" is provision for this entire life.

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It just doesn't come all at once. But I want to see it there before I need it. Instead of forgiveness for my sins, I want my own righteousness, so that I won't need his forgiveness. Instead of leading me away from temptation, I kind of just want to give in to it without there being any consequences. And instead of deliverance from evil the way God intends it in eternity, I just don't want anything difficult to happen in this life.

With every petition of the Lord's Prayer, I want something else. And maybe I see this most clearly in the things I get discouraged about. When I feel like I'm not successful or not respectable, I get really discouraged. But does God teach me to pray for those things? No; he doesn't. And if he doesn't teach me to pray for those things, then they're not the things I should desire.

Now, from beholding the face of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18), you might be more transformed than I am. There's a good chance you are. But even if you are, you still have a sinful nature that is set on your own will and on the things of this world. So examine your heart. What are those things you really desire? What makes you discouraged? Because that reveals what our hearts are set on. So what, really, do you want from God?

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The disciples wanted something from Jesus, but it was contrary to Jesus' will. They desired the glory of this world, but Jesus had his sights set on the cross. And the cross was the exact opposite of what the disciples wanted.

Context is really important to understanding the transfiguration. The passage starts with a time reference: "And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John" (9:2). Now, why would Mark mention the six days? It's really simple. He's connecting this passage with the one that comes before it. We're supposed to know and remember what happened six days earlier. So you can look back into chapter 8, beginning at verse 27.

Jesus asked his disciples what people say about him. Answers varied from John the Baptizer, to Elijah, to one of the other prophets. That was the public opinion. But then Jesus asked more directly, "**But who do you say that I am?**" (8:29). And Peter, on behalf of all of them, answered, "You are the Christ." And to be the Christ also means that Jesus is the Son of God (Matt. 16:15). So far, so good. Peter and the other disciples know who Jesus is. And beyond just knowing it, they also believe it. Believing is not less than knowing. To believe something in the biblical sense of the word is to know it and to set our trust on it. You can know something, but not give much care to it. But to believe it means that you know it to be true, and it becomes the thing you set your hopes on. That's where the disciples were. They knew that Jesus is the Christ, and they set their hopes for the future on it. That's why they followed him. They trusted that following him would fulfill their desires.

But their desires were wrong. Right after Peter confessed Jesus to be the Christ, Jesus began to teach them that it was necessary for him to be crucified and then rise again on the third day (8:31).

The disciples did not like this, so Peter pulled him aside and rebuked him. I think this is one of the funnier things in the Bible. Peter just confessed Jesus to be the Christ. And then he thinks it's his place to rebuke him. If you don't think that's funny, that's okay. I might have a different sense of humor, and you'll find something else that cracks you up. But you can at least recognize how ridiculous this is. If you really think that this guy is the Christ and the Son of God, maybe you should listen to him. But we'll come back to that point.

Peter and the other disciples had their own idea of where all this Jesus stuff should go. They, like most of the Jews, expected a political Messiah. They wanted a Christ who would overthrow

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the Roman occupation of Israel, reclaim the throne of David, and restore the worldly fortunes of Israel. Being crucified would throw a wrench into this hope. Even when Jesus says he will rise again after three days, that just doesn't compute to them. More on that later too.

They wanted an earthly kingdom. They had seen Jesus' miraculous power. Many people in Israel were believing in him. If anyone could make Israel a free nation again, it was Jesus. And the disciples had glory in their eyes. They're the twelve guys who were closest to Jesus. They expected him to claim a throne in Jerusalem, and then they would become the secondary rulers of the Jews. They would have respect, money, fame, and glory. They had their sights set on glory, but Jesus had his sights set on the cross. Peter hated this, so he rebuked Jesus for it.

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Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a high mountain. And he was transfigured before them. Now what does that mean? I've never heard this word anywhere else. It's a special word for what happened to Jesus in this moment. It means his figure was transformed. "His clothes became intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them" (9:3). The other gospels talk about his face shining (Matt. 17:2; Luke 9:29).

It's a miraculous display of light that reveals the divine glory of Jesus. But I think of it as actually being less miraculous than every other moment of Jesus' life, because the divine glory was always there. The real miracle is that Jesus didn't shine like this all the time. He was God in human flesh from the very moment he was conceived. The greater miracle is that the light didn't shine through his flesh. "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col. 1:19). It's a miracle that Mary's tummy didn't glow with intense light when she carried Jesus there. But now, for just a moment on this mountain, Jesus peels back the veil of his flesh, and the glory of God shines forth from him.

It should remind us of the Old Testament reading we had from Exodus today, about when Moses would go and speak with the LORD, and after he came out of the tent, his face would shine so bright that he had to wear a veil. It's kind of like glow in the dark toys that absorb some of the light in the daytime, so that when you turn the lights off, the toys reflect a little bit of that light. The light of the glory of God was so intense that Moses' face absorbed it and then reflected it when he came out. So now when we see this light emanating from Jesus, we should realize that he is the God who spoke with Moses in that tent.

And then, to drive this point home, Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus (9:4). Just as Jesus had spoken to these men before in the Old Testament, here they are with Jesus, speaking again.

Then Peter speaks up. This also strikes me as funny. I think I would just listen. Seriously, Peter; it's Jesus speaking with the two great prophets of the Old Testament. Just be quiet and listen. But Peter suggests that they should make three tents, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah (9:5). Now, why did Peter want to do this? Part of it could be that he wanted to preserve this moment of glory. He had been wanting Jesus to reveal his glory, so it could be that he wanted to preserve this moment. But, more than that, he was terrified. Of all the gospels which record the transfiguration of Jesus, Mark's account is my favorite, because he's the only one to include this little detail. Peter suggested this because he didn't know what to say, because they were terrified (9:6).

They had wanted Jesus to manifest his glory in Israel. They were hoping to share in that glory. But now they get a glimpse of Jesus's glory, and it terrifies them. It's too much. They saw God in his naked form. And I don't mean without clothes. His clothes were intensely white. But I mean without the veil of human flesh. For a moment, Jesus peeled back the veil and allowed his divine glory to shine through his skin.

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Now, as if this was not terrifying enough, there was more. “A cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, ‘This is my beloved Son; listen to him’” (9:7). The voice, of course, is God the Father.

The words of the Father echo Jesus’ Baptism. That’s the other time we hear him speak. At his Baptism, Jesus’ Father said, “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased” (1:11). The Father spoke to Jesus and allowed others to overhear. But at the transfiguration, it’s a little bit different. Now he speaks *about* Jesus. And he speaks directly to the disciples. And so the emphasis is on what the Father adds this time. He says, “This is my beloved Son.” Then he adds the words, “Listen to him.”

It should remind us of that passage from Deuteronomy 18 that we talked about a few weeks ago. Moses, before he died, promised that God would raise up another prophet from among the people. And Moses says, “It is to him you shall listen” (Deut. 18:15). Now Moses appears with Jesus, and God the Father says about Jesus, “Listen to him.”

Now, what about it? What part of Jesus’ teaching should we listen to? Obviously, all of it. But there’s one thing above the rest. Remember the conversation six days earlier. This is why we started by talking about that. Jesus told the disciples that he must suffer, and die, and be raised on the third day. But the disciples didn’t want to listen to it, and Peter rebuked Jesus for it. That conflict has been waiting six days for resolution, and now God the Father weighs in on the matter. Not surprisingly, he sides with Jesus.

Suddenly, it was all over. They saw what they needed to see. They heard what they needed to hear. And it was over. It was just Jesus, returned to his humble form. And Jesus instructed them not to say anything until after he had risen from the dead. So they questioned “what this rising from the dead might mean” (9:10). Again, I think this is so funny. How did they not understand what it means? Jesus used plain language. To rise from the dead means that he’s dead, but then he comes back to life. And I know this is impossible, so it might be hard for them to believe, but they had seen Jesus do this very thing to at least three other people (Mark 5:35-43; Luke 7:11-17; John 11:38-44). Their brains should compute what the words “rise from the dead” mean, and they should know that Jesus can do this. But here’s the problem: that’s not the God they want. A wise person said to me, “You can’t make people believe something they don’t want to believe.” And I don’t know if I believe him, but he was right.

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So I don’t know how to make you believe this, but the Jesus you want might not be the real Jesus. So what do you want from him? Do you want the same thing Peter and the others wanted? Do you want the glory of this world? Do you want the same things my heart wants? Respect, success, prosperity, security, comfort, friends, enjoyment of life, and all the other desires of your heart. Do you believe in the god who promises you those things? Do you believe in the god who tells you that you’re good just the way you are? That god is not real. The god I want is not real. Because I don’t want the right things. I think I do, but I don’t.

Now the real God, he’s better. You might not believe it, but he’s better. The true God is the God of the cross. He’s the God we need, because our hearts are not right. We need redemption, and that redemption comes at a bloody price. The true God is only known through the cross. If you want to know the shiny Jesus, you have to know him through the cross. When Jesus revealed his divine light to Peter, James, and John, he didn’t stay that way. He hid it again in the veil of his flesh, marched down that mountain, and on to the cross.

That’s the God we need, so that’s the God who comes to us. The sacraments are all about the cross. Baptism joins us to Jesus’ death so that we will also be raised with him. The Lord’s

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Supper takes the body and blood of Jesus, that was crucified and raised, and places him in our mouths.

The Scriptures reveal the event of the cross. So consider that event. Paint the picture in your mind. A humble looking Jewish man. He's stripped of most or all of his clothing. His hands and feet are secured to a cross by nails. His back has already been torn apart by a scourge. It's bleeding from several gashes. If you looked into those gashes, you would see muscle tissue, maybe bone. He's wearing a crown of thorns. Think of a rose bush, and those branches twisted together and slid down his forehead and through his hair.

Beside the physical agony. He knows that he's being crucified by the very people he came to save. They hate him. They shout insults at him. And the worst is the guilt of all the sin of the world. For the first and only time, he is separated from God his Father, because he bears all the sin of the world in his body, and the wrath of God is poured out upon him.

Consider the feeling of guilt. At some point in life, I am sure you have felt guilt. It's like a weight in your chest, and it feels like your heart is going to sink into your stomach. Now consider that feeling, multiplied by all your sins, and then multiply it by all the people in the history of the world. That's the guilt that was laid on Jesus. And in that state, he died. He carried all that sin into death. He put that sin to death, and he overcome death.

Now the point is not to feel sorry for Jesus. He doesn't want that. He doesn't need that. The point is that this is your God. This is the God who forgives all your sins. He's the God who will raise you from the dead and bring you into his eternal new creation. This is the God Jesus insisted that he must be. We only know God through the cross. And if this is true God, then this God is good.

Of everything I've said to you, above all, remember this: The Jesus of the cross might not be the Jesus you want, but he is the real Jesus, and he is the Jesus you need. And if this is the real Jesus, then he is good. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.