

**Jesus' Authority as the Divine Son**  
**Mark 9:2-13**  
**March 17, 2024**

When you take the time to look and listen, you quickly see how astonishing the things Jesus did and said were. What He taught about the Kingdom of God, What He said about Himself and what He did set in motion events that touch us today.

For the last six weeks we've focused on Mark's description of the astonishing things that Jesus did, knowing that Jesus did these things to show us who He actually is. When we place these stories side by side, we see how they become pieces of a beautiful mosaic that help us see the full description of our Lord.

It all began with Jesus forgiving a man's sins and then healing his paralysis. In doing so Jesus declared He is God, the only One who has authority to forgive sins and the power to redeem people from illness. That is significant on its own. But it did not stop there.

We saw how Jesus has authority over any illness and all creation. Casting out the legion of demons proved He has undisputed authority over the demonic realm. In raising Jairus' daughter, He proved he has power over death. By walking on the waves and calming the storm He displays His power over the abyss and the chaotic waters.

Witnesses to these events were filled with astonishment, wonder, awe, fear and even terror. They knew they were with someone who was more than what He appeared to be.

The story we look at today is the climax of this part of our sermon series. If all the other things Jesus did point to His divinity, this one confirms it. Today we come to the moment when the veil was removed, and three disciples were given the chance to see the glory of Jesus' divine nature. This is a familiar story to many, but one that still holds the opportunity for us to be astonished and amazed.

The context begins at 8:27. Here we learn that Jesus and His disciples were on their way to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. It was there, in that region, that Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Christ," and Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about Him.

It was immediately after this that Jesus began to tell them that He must suffer many things, be rejected by the leaders, be killed and three days later rise again. This was contrary to everything the disciples were expecting and so they had a hard time accepting it. Peter even rebuked Jesus for saying such things!

So, they profess their belief that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus challenges their understanding of what that means, they don't want to listen to this hard teaching, and then He shows them who He really is. Mark 9:2-13.

<sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. <sup>4</sup> And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

<sup>5</sup> 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." <sup>6</sup> (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

<sup>7</sup> Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

<sup>8</sup> Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

<sup>9</sup> As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. <sup>10</sup> They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.

<sup>11</sup> And they asked him, "Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

<sup>12</sup> Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected?

<sup>13</sup> But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him."

So many questions come to mind for me in this, but I will only take time to focus on two. What mountain were they on and why did Jesus only choose three disciples to be with Him?

Other questions—like what is the significance of six days, what's the deal with Elijah and Moses appearing, why did Peter offer to make three shelters, and some others—will have to be in the endnotes and part of the Wednesday Facebook Live podcast.<sup>i</sup> Rather than fill our heads with interesting supportive details, my hope is that we will leave this place astonished at what took place on that mountain.

It was the question of the mountain and the number of disciples that opened an interesting door for me. Where were they and why was it only Peter, James and John who witnessed this unveiling of our Lord's true nature? Just last week David said that by walking on and quieting the chaotic waters Jesus put His divine nature on display in front of all 12 disciples. So, why didn't He do this in front everyone too?

The fact that Jesus chose these three is no surprise. He's done this before and He'll do it again at the Garden of Gethsemane.<sup>ii</sup> We don't know why Jesus selected these three for special events, but we do know that He excluded the others from this moment.

Why was that? Maybe these three were His closest friends. Or maybe they had strong influence on the others and Jesus wanted to give them what they would need to help the others listen to Jesus, follow what He says and stay faithful even when things got really hard.

That is possible, but is that all this moment was about? Was this all about helping three of them embolden the others? Could this moment be for someone else too?

Maybe this event was more for Jesus. In the same way that an angel ministered to Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, perhaps this was a meeting to encourage or strategize about what was coming.

Moses and Elijah represent the law and the prophets. These two knew who He was and had already written about His coming (Luke 24:27). On top of that, they had also witnessed the unveiling of God's glory on a mountain so it is natural that they would be here.

But then, this encouragement could have been offered without the mountain and without the dazzling, undeniable expression of Jesus' divinity. If it is not primarily for the disciples or for Jesus, who might this have been for?

I think the *primary* purpose of this moment was for another audience, and I say that because of where they were.

### **SLIDE – Mount Tabor**

It was a couple hundred years after the resurrection that Mount Tabor was identified as the mountain on which our Lord was transfigured. Tabor is located 18 miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee and is just under 1,900 feet high. Did people in Jesus' day consider this a "high" mountain? I don't know. But I do know that in Jesus' day the summit of Tabor was inhabited which would have made finding a secluded spot rather challenging.

We also know that the transfiguration story is connected to them being in the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi, a city which is located at the base of a mountain range on which Mount Hermon can be found. This is where things get interesting.

### **SLIDE – Mount Hermon**

Mount Hermon is about 40 miles northeast of the Sea of Galilee and marks the northernmost point of the Promised Land. At over 9,000 feet, it is more than two-and-one-half times higher than any other mountain in the Holy Land. Rather than a peaked summit, Hermon is more of a sprawling ridgeline that is 28 miles long and 15 miles wide. Even today it has many secluded places.

The area averages 70 inches of precipitation per year and all that water flows to the base of the mountain. That is why people did not live on the top of this mountain. They lived at its base where all the water and the resulting resources could be found.

### **SLIDE - Water**

The abundant water brought ecological diversity to this land. It became known as a place of rich fertility. Walking through this area is an interesting experience. There are fragrances and bird calls found only here and no matter where you are the sound of running water surrounds you and can even be heard under your feet.

Many scholars today believe that Hermon is likely the mountain Jesus climbed. I agree and think He went there for a reason. The rich fertility of the area led people to believe that this must be a place frequented by the gods. This connection between the land and a spiritual reality has a long history.

Back in Abraham's day the mountain was called BA'AL Hermon and was the place where the god BA'AL was worshipped. From a Jewish perspective, this mountain was also known as the place rebellious angels—beings also known as demons—descended to earth to wreak havoc on God's plans.

It was believed that all those gods passed through this area for a specific reason—this one spot contained the Gates of Hades.

### **SLIDE – Cave and ruins.**

At the base of the mountain is a cave. It used to be that waters came up from the depths and flowed out into the land. This cave and its deep river seemed like a natural gateway to the underworld. People believed this was the place spiritual beings came up into our world and entered back into their own. If you wanted to catch the attention of and receive a blessing from a particular deity, then this was the place to come.

That's the reason we see the ruins of so many ancient worship sites to the right of the cave. People came here to seek favor from a specific deity and so they built buildings and carved out spaces in the rock called an apse or niche to hold the idol of their god.

Jewish people considered this area to be an evil place, filled with idols and demonic activity. Mentioning Mount Sinai would bring to their minds thoughts of holy ground. Mentioning Mount Hermon would bring to their minds thoughts of unholy ground.

### **SLIDE - Bashan**

Just south of the mountain range is the area known as Bashan. It is a smooth, fertile land that was known for its cattle. While many good things are mentioned of Bashan, it too carried a demonic association.

Bashan had cattle so it also had bulls. Because of their strength and fertility, bulls were often used to symbolize BA'AL and other deities. Remember how the Israelites set up a golden calf (bull) in the wilderness? When the tribes split after Solomon's death, Jeroboam set up an alternate worship site in the city of Dan. At the very center of which sat a golden calf (or bull). This ancient site is a short ten-minute drive from the Gates of Hades.

In the same way that we associate the Bermuda Triangle with mysteriously lost ships and planes or Yellowstone Park with geysers and natural wonders, referencing Mount Hermon or Bashan in Jesus' day brought up images of evil and the demonic.

And so Jesus came to this place—a place filled with rival gods and demons—to ask the disciples who they thought He was ("Am I one of these gods to you?") and to reveal His true nature to those who were present.

When Jesus was transfigured, His outer appearance was changed to match His inner nature so that what was seen on the outside now matched His nature on the inside. Anyone familiar with the Old Testament would immediately get the meaning of this moment.

Bright clothing and bright light were Old Testament descriptions of divinity,<sup>iii</sup> and the thick, enveloping cloud was a standard indication of YHWH's presence. It is no wonder that the three disciples were terrified. They knew what this meant.

All these elements came together in one place to declare that a new day was dawning. The tabernacle of God was not a tent and not a stone temple. It was Jesus. God incarnate. The Christ. The King of all creation. God with us. The message could not be clearer.

Did you notice something about the voice that came from the cloud? At His baptism the voice addressed Jesus, "You are my beloved Son." But on the mountain, the voice addressed a different audience. "This is my son whom I love."<sup>iv</sup>

I am confident that this was for the disciples, but the fact that they were to remain silent combines with the location to leave me with the strong hunch it was also for the other audience present that day, an audience that was eavesdropping on the whole event.

I think Jesus traveled to the northernmost point of the land to take the message of His divinity and Kingdom into the very center of a demonic stronghold. By confidently walking into the place that they occupied for millennia and removing His disguise Jesus was making a statement to all who opposed Him. "I am the King and I have come to reclaim and take back what is rightfully mine. The Kingdom of God is breaking into this world now and you can't stop it!"

As we would expect, His enemies responded and so from this point on we see a noticeable increase in opposition and in Jesus' commitment to complete the work.<sup>v</sup>

That increase in opposition was fueled by the powers and principalities of this present age. In 1 Corinthians 2:8 Paul calls them the rulers of this age and says that if they had understood what God was doing, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

But crucifixion was their goal. Death was their primary weapon and they wanted Jesus dead in the most horrible way, and we get wind of this in what Jesus said from the cross.

When Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1 (My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?), He was pointing us to the entire Psalm which is an amazing description of His own crucifixion. While we see clear connection in words about being despised, thirsting, His bones being out of joint and evil men who cast lots for His clothing, there is one verse in here that brings a new understanding to the battle He was in and the suffering He endured.

Psalm 22:12 says, "Many Bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me." Bulls of Bashan is a reference to the demonic spirits that He confronted on Mount Hermon. At our Lord's greatest moment of agony, He saw that people were not the only beings surrounding His cross and mocking Him that day.

At the Transfiguration, Jesus walked into the enemy stronghold, confirmed for them all who He actually is, and they responded with lethal fury. What took place on that mountain put in motion the certainty of Palm Sunday, The Last Supper, The Garden Prayer, the Cross and the Resurrection.

Jesus is the King who has all authority in heaven and on earth. He forgives sins. Heals diseases. Controls nature. Multiplies food. Commands demons. Overrides death. Walks on the abyss. Calms the chaotic waters. We know Him to be veiled in flesh, the Godhead seen.

Each story in the gospels is an individual piece of a mosaic. Each one is beautiful on its own, but when placed together they form a more complete image of Jesus in His true nature. Take the time to look at the pieces. Take the time to look at the image. Take the time to listen. Take the time to hear. And be astonished.

## **Prayer**

We don't have to go to a mountain to see you and unlike back then, your true presence and nature is not limited to only a few. You said that you would be with us always, even to the very end of the age. You are here, right now. You are with us in all your risen glory.

As we enter the coming weeks of your passion, death and resurrection, speak to us and bring us to that place of being astonished for who you are, what you have done and for how you are always in the room with us.

---

<sup>i</sup> Six days after Peter professes Jesus to be the Christ, they ascend a high mountain together. When reading scripture, always notice the details. Six days of waiting then a high mountain experience with God. It sounds familiar. The disciples knew their scriptures and they remembered how Moses waited six days before he encountered God on Mount Sinai. Though He didn't speak it with words, Jesus was speaking through the waiting.

So, what's the deal with Elijah and Moses and the shelters? Well, the quick answer is simple—no one knows for sure. Everyone has an opinion about it but I think it is instructive to notice that Peter didn't really know why he mentioned three shelters. Maybe he was just wanting to do something, anything, to deal with the awe and fear welling up in him. Distraction? And here we notice another important detail that is easy to miss—they were terrified.

Why Moses and Elijah? Again, there are many speculations as to why they were there. We know that Moses and Elijah are the only humans who had God pass before them and speak to them while they were on a mountain so this would not be new to them.

We also know that these two represent the law and the prophets. Do you remember what Jesus shared with the two disciples He met on the road to Emmaus? Luke tells us, "Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

Jesus came to fulfill the law and the prophets anticipated His arrival. The appearance of Moses and Elijah affirm that Jesus' presence is connected to the Law and prophets and so is part of a long-held, divine plan.

The voice coming from the cloud adds greater weight as the Father adds the command, "Listen to Him." Peter had just tried to change Jesus' mind about what was to come and the Father is saying, "You listen and do what He says."

<sup>ii</sup> They witnessed the raising of Jairus' daughter, the Transfiguration here and Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.

<sup>iii</sup> Jewish readers would associate dazzling white clothing with divine beings, Daniel 7:9

<sup>iv</sup> That same voice once spoke to Moses (Ex 24:15-18) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:8-18)

<sup>v</sup> Luke records that it was right after the transfiguration that Jesus became resolute about going to Jerusalem and drinking the cup that was His to drink.