**Eyewitnesses of His majesty** 7/24dkm

Read: Mark 9:1-13, 2Peter 1

Text: Mark 9:2-13

Psalms: 84:1-2 & 10-12, 110:1-2 &5-7, 2:1-7, 117

The words of our sermon title are those of the apostle Peter, as found in his second letter. I recently read both Peter’s letters looking for any references to events is his life. Peter was the first to confess Jesus as the Messiah or Christ, although he was then rebuked by Jesus for disagreeing that he would die and rise again on the third day (8:29, 33). Peter would go on to deny Christ, and to be restored by the risen Jesus Christ. But in these letters it is his experience on the holy mountain, as recorded here by Mark, that Peter recalls, and from which he teaches, ‘The prophetic word confirmed’ (2Peter 1:19). We believe that Peter was with Mark when he wrote this gospel. All three synoptic gospels record the transfiguration of Jesus on a high mountain somewhere near Caesarea Philippi, possibly Mt Hermon (8:27).

It was just a week after Jesus first told his disciples that he must suffer and be killed and after three days rise again (8:31). This was the revelation that Peter rejected. He did not understand that the promised Messiah must die and rise again on the third day. The idea of suffering was not his agenda for Messiah, or for himself; he rejected the idea of suffering for the gospel, as many still do. Jesus rebuked Peter for his rejection of the idea of suffering. The Peter who boldly rebuked Jesus is confronted, and effectively silenced, by the heavenly glory and majesty of Jesus here on the mountain. James and John were with him as a select or inner group from the Twelve (9:2, cf. Luke 8:51).

As we look at the details of this event and try to digest them ourselves, do consider what this meant for Jesus as the reality of the cross loomed larger for him. Jesus spoke with Moses and Elijah about what he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). Consider also what it meant for the three disciples who witnessed this supernatural event while trying to comprehend what Jesus had just said about being killed and rising again.

Consider also what it means for you today. Do you struggle to understand these things? If not, it may be that you are not trying to do so, not facing up to the reality of these truths. Imagine for a moment being with these disciples on that mountain and seeing what they saw, and hearing what they heard. Does your religion, your faith in Jesus, take into account the transfiguration of Jesus? Alan Cole makes the interesting comment that, ‘The true transfiguration, the *metamorphosis*, had been at Bethlehem, as Philippians shows (Phil 2:6,7)’.

**1. Transfigured**

What does it mean to be transfigured? The Greek word is *‘metamorpheo*’ meaning a change in appearance or form, an outward and/or inward transformation. It is used of being transformed inwardly by ‘the renewing of your mind’ in Romans 12:2. Here on the holy mountain and with reference to Jesus it refers to an outward change. This change was seen in his clothes becoming radiant, dazzling white like snow, a brilliant whiteness that no bleach in an earthly laundromat could produce (9:3). Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark does not refer to Jesus’ face shining like the sun (Mat 17:2, Luke 9:29). Think about looking into the blazing sun; we cannot look for long.

The radiant face of Jesus reminds us of what John saw of the risen and glorified Jesus on the island of Patmos: ‘His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength’ (Rev 1:16). Similarly, his clothes were bright (Rev 1:13). Note that the response of John to this vision was the same as the disciple’s response to what they saw (Mat 17:6, Rev 1:17). ‘Before the eyes of his most intimate disciples, the human appearance of Jesus was for a moment changed into that of a heavenly being in the transfigured world’. We could say that they had a glimpse into heaven, again not unlike the vision of John in Revelation 4.

When Jesus comes again, as he said he will, he will come on the clouds of heaven in great glory (Mat 24:30). And when he does the dead in Christ will rise to meet him in the air. We will be changed or transformed to see Jesus as he is (1John 3:2). Does this not mean that in our resurrected heavenly body we will see Jesus as he was on the holy mountain (Phil 3:21)?

**2. Talking with Moses and Elijah**

Moses and Elijah had both died and gone to heaven, so it is fitting to see them with Jesus, appearing in heavenly glory. In fact, neither of these men was actually buried by men. Their actual appearance on the mountain is not described but they were recognised by the disciples. Why Moses and why Elijah? Moses was the great lawgiver; he went up on Mt Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments from God. The Law pointed forward to Christ and was fulfilled in Him. Similarly, the Prophets were fulfilled in Christ, and Elijah was in a sense the father of the prophets (Mat 5:17, Luke 24:44).

The presence of Moses and Elijah with Christ in this scene on the mountain was an endorsement of their teaching concerning Christ, Christ’s endorsement of their teaching about him. History was being drawn together in Christ. The disciples were about to witness the high point in mankind’s history. ‘Jesus was about to accomplish the greatest deliverance in the history of the world, our deliverance from sin and death’.

Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus (9:4). Luke tells us that they were talking about the imminent departure of Jesus, a departure he would accomplish at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). They were discussing his death and resurrection. They, like their contemporaries, and like the disciples, were waiting for the redemption of Israel (Luke 2:25, 38). They were looking forward to what you as a believer look back to, namely the cross of Jesus Christ where the sins of the elect were dealt with, and where victory over death was won.

**3. Three tents**

The transfiguration of Jesus and the appearance of Moses and Elijah in glory had the effect of waking Peter and those with him (Luke 9:31, 32). These men were startled to say the least. Peter once again managed to say something foolish. The Lord had to intervene to stop him actually doing something foolish. We read that Peter ‘answered’ Jesus although no question was asked. He addressed Jesus respectfully as ‘Rabbi’ or ‘Lord’, but what he said was self-centred, as well as foolish: ‘It is good for us to be here’ (9:5, Mat 17:4). While witnessing heavenly glory he was focussed on earthly things. Peter said, ‘Let us make three tabernacles/tents: one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah’ (9:5, Mat 17:4). Where did he get such an idea? It was an earthly not a heavenly idea! At the Feast of Tabernacles, the Jews made little shelters to live in for the duration of the Feast. It was to remind them of their years in the wilderness being led by Moses.

This was a foolish suggestion because it was looking back to the old covenant that was being fulfilled in Jesus before his very eyes. Peter was focussed on the past, and on earthly things, even as he glimpsed the glory of heaven. I once asked some Christians students in India if they were not mistaking life in America or Australia for heaven! I could add that some Christians in the West make the same mistake as they dwell on the ‘good old days’ to the extent that they fail to appreciate the glimpses of heaven that we are given in the Bible.

Peter’s suggestion was foolish in another respect also. Jesus was talking with Moses and Elijah, but they were there to honour him not to be compared to him. How could Peter think of Moses being put on the same platform as the Son of God! Before Peter could say or do anything else, a cloud came and overshadowed them. Peter did not know the foolishness of what we was saying or proposing to do. He and his two fellow disciples were filled with fear (9:6, Luke 9:34)

**4. This is my beloved Son**

The three disciples were awake and witnessing a scene of heaven upon earth when they were enveloped by a bright cloud and heard ‘a voice come out of the cloud’ (9:7). Paul was similarly arrested by a light from heaven and a voice speaking to him (Acts 9:3, 4); he heard but he did not see Jesus in his glory. The cloud was not a normal cloud; it brought light not darkness, especially in the night. It is surely a reminder of Moses going up on the mountain that was covered with a thick cloud to receive the Ten Commandments, and later of the divine presence or Shekinah glory coming upon the Mosaic tabernacle (Exod 19:16, 40:35). This enveloping cloud caused such fear to come upon Peter that he became silent. A proper fear of the Lord would also cause us to become silent on his presence.

The sound of a voice coming from the cloud confirms the suggestion that the cloud represented the divine presence. The voice said, ‘This is my beloved Son. Hear Him!’ (9:7, cf. Mat 17:5). Only God the Father could say such words. In Psalm 2:7 we sing of the Lord saying, ‘You are my Son!’ In Deuteronomy 18:15 the people are told to ‘hear him’, as in the Prophet like Moses who would arise in their midst. Furthermore, at the baptism of Jesus a voice came from heaven saying, ‘This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased’ (1:11). Peter referred to this voice, and these words, as the ‘prophetic word confirmed’, when he recalled the transfiguration of Jesus on the holy mountain in 2Peter 1:17.

There was no mistaking the reference to Jesus, and the command to listen to him. Was there an element of rebuke in this voice which silenced Peter? Peter was given to speaking rather than listening- like most of us! We must all learn to listen more, to listen to each other but especially listen to the Lord. The time came for the ‘changed’ Peter to speak, which he did most powerfully on the day of Pentecost, with the result that thousands were saved.

**4. Touched by Jesus**

The enveloping cloud and the sound of God’s voice caused the three disciples to fall on their faces in fear (Mat 17:6). John similarly fell on his face in fear before a vision of Jesus in heaven (Rev 1:17). Are you ready to fall on your face in fear when Jesus returns on the clouds of heaven? It will be an awesome sight. But like these disciples, and like John in his vision, you as a believer will be touched by Jesus and told to arise. You will arise and be received into heavenly glory by your saviour and Lord.

Jesus came and touched Peter, James, and John as they lay prostrate before him there on the mountain. He told them to get up, and when they did so they saw no one but Jesus (Mat 17:7). They saw Jesus in his incarnation, his heavenly glory having disappeared, at least in his outward appearance. But they saw Jesus in a whole new way after this mountain-top experience, this glimpse of Jesus in his heavenly glory.

Peter, as we have noted, never forgot this glimpse of Jesus in heavenly glory. You are not an ‘eyewitness of His majesty’ like Peter, but Peter understood this when he wrote, ‘Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith- the salvation of your souls’ (1Peter 1:8,9). ‘We have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place’ (2Peter 1:19). Peter did not tell us to seek such an experience, or to listen to people who say they have had such an experience, or to listen to fables and dreams. He tells us to listen to the ‘prophetic word’ as in the words of the Bible.

**5. Tell no one**

As the three disciples literally, and spiritually, came down the mountain, Jesus told them not to speak to anyone about what they had just experienced, at least not until after his resurrection (9:9). He expected them to believe and understand by that time, that he must suffer and die and rise from the dead after three days. Jesus did not want foolish talk about his work as Messiah; it is doubtful if anyone would have believed them anyway.

The disciples were still questioning what Jesus meant by ‘rising from the dead’ (9:10). The had heard the religious leaders saying that Elijah must come first, come before Messiah (9:11, cf. Mal 4:5). Jesus helped the disciples to understand that the sending of ‘Elijah the prophet’ was not some form of reincarnation; they had just seen Elijah in their glimpse into heaven. They understood that the prophecy of Malachi was fulfilled in the coming of John the Baptist (Mat 17:13). Jesus also reminded them of other prophecy about himself, about the Son of Man suffering and being treated with contempt (9:12). They were slowly coming to understand what they read in the Scriptures. If you sometimes struggle to understand the Bible, do not give up; keep reading and keep asking the Lord to help you understand and believe.