

Mark 9:1-13

The Awesome Jesus

*O God,
in the transfiguration of your Son you confirmed
the mysteries of the faith by the witness of Moses and Elijah,
and in the voice from the cloud you foreshadowed
our adoption as your children:
make us, with Christ, heirs of your glory,
and bring us to enjoy its fullness;
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen*

Moved by Beauty

I've been thinking recently about how beauty so amazes us that it compels us to want to change. We see something incredible and it awes us and moves us. Or we experience kindness from a total stranger. Or we experience grace from a friend when we are being absolutely rotten toward them, and their love which we don't deserve brings us to realise how we have wronged them and compels us to ask for forgiveness.

Beauty changes us.

Beauty can also be so incredible that we just do not know how to respond to it. I can think of several occasions when as a teenage boy, I would be introduced to a girl who I found so beautiful that I had no idea what to say or do. Long before I met Liz, I remember being so thrown by a girl's beauty, her name was Vicky, that when I first met her at youth group I could not look at her. Or I'd look at her and think "*Wow, she's beautiful.*" But then look away, her beauty was too much. But then I'd have to look again because she was beautiful. I was so confused by it all.

Now I understand... I think what was going on. She was so beautiful to me that I was both attracted to her beauty but also could not believe that

anyone could be so beautiful as she was, and I was also incredibly self-conscious that I was not beautiful. She was glorious; I was not. Attracted to her; yet *“Am I allowed close?”* Teenage years were so confusing!

Beauty is confusing; we often don't know how to respond to it.

Focus

Well in our passage today, there is no awkward teenage boy dazzled by a girl's beauty, but there are three grown men who witness someone so resplendent that they are utterly overwhelmed, confused, terrified. Fortunately for them (and for us today), the very one who overwhelms them, explains to them what has just happened and what it all means. And this glorious reality transforms them for the rest of their lives — and it can change *us* if we allow Him to.

In 20 Words...

So what takes place in Mark 9? Let me retell the event to you in 20 words, and as I do, think about what other event in the Bible is like this.

God's man. Followers. High mountain. God's man glorified.
 People confused, terrified. Cloud with voice.
 God's man explains. People still confused.

Now I hope this works... what other event came to mind? In other words, what event is Mark trying to get his readers to recall? Any idea?

That's right... when Moses went up Mount Sinai.

If you don't know this story, you can read it in Exodus 33–34. And there, God comes to Mount Sinai in a cloud and Moses goes up to ask God if he can see His face. God replies, *“You will see my glory, but only the tail-end of it. For no one may see me and live.”* God is so great and glorious that it would be too much for anyone to behold Him, so Moses only gets a glimpse of His glory.

Yet just this glimpse of God makes his face shine — like he’s reflecting the sun. So when Moses goes back down the mountain to the people they are afraid of him. Moses *has* to call them to come to him. And when they do, he shares with them what God said. And they listen as if God were speaking. And we read in Exodus 34:33–35 that,

³³ When Moses had finished speaking with the people, he put a veil on his face; ³⁴ but whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, ³⁵ the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with God.

Can you see the connection between the two events?

Greater Revelation

Last Tuesday night a few of us went to a talk entitled, *What is true Islam? And who is my Muslim neighbour?* It was really helpful in encouraging Christians to share Jesus with our Muslim neighbours. And the speaker Richard Shumack reminded us Muslims believe that their god Allah is indeed great, but they could never envisage anyone ever coming before Allah into his presence. Not even Muhammed was worthy to come before Allah, but only heard from Allah through an angel.

Yet in the Bible we have Moses (who is far from perfect) being allowed to come into the very presence of the holy God and talk to Him and hear from Him and be taught by Him. And then take God’s Words and repeat them to others so that they too might know God and worship Him.

Yet what we have with Jesus is even greater still. What takes place with Moses was but a shadow, a pre-cursor, a foretaste, a glimpse of *the* wonderful reality that Jesus is.

There are similarities between the two events, yet also differences.

- Moses is a man of God; Jesus has been claiming to be God in the flesh.
- Both go up a mountain, though Moses goes alone, Jesus has three disciples with Him.
- Moses reflects God's glory like a mirror reflects the sun; but Jesus, He *produces* God's glory, it radiates *from* Him, He *is* Light.
- Moses can 'disguise' in a way God's glory by putting on a veil; but Jesus is so glorious that not even His clothes can hide His light! *'and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.'*
- Moses points people to God; Jesus points people to Himself.
- Moses is by himself with God; Jesus has Moses and Elijah the prophet turn up to talk to *Him* — secondary players who are only there to point you to the main player. His wingmen. His cheerleaders! [At this point in my sermon prep I spent a few minutes imagining two old men with pom-poms shouting, "*Jesus!*" **clap clap clap**]

Anyway... there's more...

- The people saw Moses and were terrified; the disciples see Jesus and are terrified.
- God talks to Moses to talk to the people; but at the transfiguration, God the Father talks directly to Peter, James and John, "*This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to Him!*"

Now there are other things I haven't mentioned, but you see that in every possible way, while what happens with Moses is incredible, what happens with Jesus blows Moses out of the water. And we haven't even mentioned how great Elijah the prophet was and how he represents all the prophets in the Old Testament — and Jesus is greater than him and Moses combined. They've got nothing on Him!

And the simple instruction, the very understandable command, that comes from God the Father to the disciples is three-fold,

“This is my Son, — He is who He claims to be.
my beloved; — He has my love, my approval / favour / blessing.
listen to Him!” — When He speaks to you I am speaking to you.
“Let the one with ears to hear listen.”

The Disciples Survive!

Now it's clear that the disciples are still baffled by what they see, as they keep discussing what has happened with Jesus as they head back down. But God has made it crystal clear to them how they are to respond to His Son, *“Listen to Him!”* The writer of Hebrews would later write,

*“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory
 and the exact representation of His being.”*

But another thing that is incredible about this is that the disciples see God and do not die. God had told Moses *“No one can see my face and live...”* In other words, *“Between me and you there is this infinite gap You can’t take my reality. You can’t endure my absolute perfection. It would destroy you.”* Yet the disciples see Jesus who is God and live. How?

In v.8, we are told, *‘Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.’* Moses is no longer there, neither is Elijah, only Jesus. Moses and Elijah do not need to be there because they pointed to Jesus and if you have Jesus you... well, you have access to God. Jesus is the bridge between the infinite God of glory and us who are not glorious. Moses brought God’s Words, Jesus is God who speaks to you. Elijah prophesied of a Saviour to come and that Saviour is Jesus. Jesus is the bridge.

And He comes declaring to all that through Him they can come to God. They can come into His presence because He has authority and the desire to forgive sins; to make people clean and perfect them so that they can come before the perfect only God.

This is indeed glorious.

But let's make sure we listen to Jesus carefully about how we are brought into His glory.

Listen to Jesus

After the experience on the mount, the disciples are baffled, but Jesus instructs them. And in v.9, we read that He teaches them that they must tell no-one about what they had seen — imagine how difficult that must have been for them! In fact, they would have to wait until *after* the Son of Man had risen from the dead — and this *rising from the dead* makes no sense to them either.

What Jesus is teaching them (and us today; we must listen) is that the way to be swept up into His glory involves first dying before rising; death before life. Jesus keeps repeating to His disciples that before He is exalted, He would be crucified. More strongly still, He states the way to glory is *through* His crucifixion. Without it there is no glory. And as His disciples, they would follow in His footsteps.

Yet Jesus goes to the cross where He dies in our place and when we see His sacrificial love for us who deserve to die for the way we have turned from God yet He has come to us in Jesus to save us; when we see His grace, we see His glory and it is beautiful — He transforms us.

I don't know what you see when you see that Jesus has died for you, but maybe you find Him so beautiful you are frightened to approach Him because you are so very aware at how unworthy you are. If that is you, listen to Jesus who calls you to Himself promising forgiveness. As He often says, "*Do not be afraid.*" Come to Him.

If you find Him beautiful, allow Him to envelop you. Allow this truth to sink deep and grow within you. Rejoice in His salvation and be

strengthened that He will keep His word. And while you struggle and strive through this life, He has equipped and empowered you to come to Him — and you will.

See Jesus; Be Transformed

Another story Richard Shumack shared on Tuesday night was about a young devout Muslim man Mustafa had come to Melbourne to study. But a week into his university degree, Mustafa got sick and ended up in hospital and his lecturer came to visit.

Now Richard shared how it is difficult for us to understand the gap Muslims see between a university lecturer and a student. Why would teachers have anything to do with students? So when the lecturer turned up to see Mustafa, Mustafa said, *“What are you doing here?!”*

The lecturer simply replied, *“I follow Jesus, and He calls me to love my neighbour.”* Mustafa said, *“That’s what I’ve been looking for!”* Mustafa saw something glorious. He saw a teacher and a stranger love him for no reason whatsoever except that God had called him to. And that simple act, with that simple explanation, meant he saw something so beautiful, and understood in an instant the source of its beauty: Jesus.

And he came to Jesus.

Lord Jesus, Give us eyes to see your glory and transform us for your glory. For you are the holy and eternal and majestic King. Amen