

Sermon, February 11, 2024
2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9
“Seeing is Believing”
Rev. Ricci Arthur



The date was February 3, 1970; I was a 19-year-old sophomore at Asbury College in Kentucky, and this particular day turned out to be one of the major turning points of my life; let me set up the scene for you.

Asbury College is a Christian college, nestled in the very small village of Wilmore, Kentucky. It is a beautiful campus, and in the middle of the campus is a building named Hughes Auditorium, named after its founder, John Wesley Hughes, and it was the spiritual center of the campus. In this building, there was a large 1200 seat auditorium in which 3 required chapel services were held each week. The chapel services were inspirational; the format was usually music followed by a special speaker, either someone from the campus faculty, or an outside speaker.

February 3rd, 1970, was a regularly scheduled chapel service, and on this particular day, something unusual happened. Instead of having a special speaker, the floor was open for anyone to share a testimony about their faith in Christ; almost immediately, one of the students, a star basketball player, stood up and, surprisingly and with great emotion, shared how his life had been a fake, but the previous evening he had accepted Christ into his life and he wanted to share that, and then he asked for forgiveness of those he had wronged within the student body. All of a sudden, I had a feeling of the Presence of God.

After his testimony, students began standing up at their seats, spontaneously, one after another, and began confessing their sins to the whole student body, asking for forgiveness. I realize that in your ears this morning, this kind of thing may sound really strange, but in my hearing, it was not only surprising, but was also very powerful. None of these testimonies were inappropriate; at one point, students were asked to come forward to pray at a rail in front of the auditorium.

Hundreds began coming; they would pray for perhaps 5 minutes or less at the front, and then, one by one, many of them would come to the podium and confess bitterness and other sins to the entire student body. For instance, they would confess bitterness toward their family, fellow students, their professors – they would confess fear – fear of being far from God – from others - many different things. And yet at the same time as they spoke from their hearts, you could feel the healing power of God. You could sense the Mighty Love of God. I was fascinated. What I saw that day was heartfelt devotion to God, and a reality that I had never seen or felt before.

The outpouring of God's Spirit was so great that classes were cancelled that day so that students could remain in the chapel confessing their sins and giving testimony to the Power of God in their lives. Then, for the following week, all classes were cancelled, and the chapel was open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. For seven days, this 1200 seat auditorium would be packed even at 3 AM, with students continuing to give testimony and receiving healing from God, and great efforts were made for them to be reconciled to one another. There was also testimony of how they had become reconciled to God. There was music that gave Praise to God. There was no preaching – ever! Simply music sung in Praise to God, testimonies- usually 5 minutes in length. Thousands of people from the neighboring community and cities came to Hughes Auditorium, and their lives also were changed.

It is hard to describe in words how the campus was transformed; this outpouring was much more than a momentary emotional experience; it was a deep movement of the Spirit of God in our midst drawing us to Jesus and to one another.

It was the greatest manifestation of the Power and Majesty of God I have ever experienced in my entire life, even to this day; and as I said, at that time I was only 19 years old! As a result of this outpouring that began on February 3, 1970, the course of my life changed; I had gone to Asbury to become a high school history teacher, but because of that week and the events that flowed from it, I was eventually called into the ministry, and for the next 40 plus years I became a pastor.

It is amazing how one event can turn into a turning point.

Although that momentous week in my life was unforgettable as I experienced the Power and majesty of God, even though that week changed my life forever, it pales in comparison to the scene before us here in Mark chapter 9.

The scripture says in verse 2 that after six days Jesus takes Peter, James, and John to a high mountain.

What had happened six days before the Transfiguration? It was a conversation that Jesus had with His disciples in Mark 8 where He asked them this question: “Who do people say that I am?” And they said that people thought He was Elijah or one of the prophets. Then He asked them this question that came from His Heart to their heart: “Who do you say that I am?” And Peter spoke up and said:

Mark 8:29: You are the Messiah

Up to this point in time, the disciples knew who He was – they were living in that realm like I did with my former prescription glasses – they could see clearly who Jesus was, just as I did - even from the beginning of my spiritual journey with God – but when Peter proclaimed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, it means that He – and the disciples - had come into an even deeper understanding of who Jesus was. It was like they were given a new set of glasses that saw Jesus even more clearly. They saw clearly that He was unique amongst all of the historical figures who had ever lived or ever will live. He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Let me be clear – out of all the figures who have ever walked this Globe, Jesus stands alone – He is the God/Man – He is fully God, and fully Man. We refer to Jesus being fully God and fully man with a big word – Incarnation – fully God, fully human. He is unique and above all others who have ever walked this, Globe.

And so, six days later, Jesus is transfigured before them on this mountain.

At that point, the scripture says, Moses and Elijah appeared before Jesus and the disciples. And they were talking to Jesus. What were they talking about?

Although the Mark passage does not mention what they talked about, the Luke account of the transfiguration gives us the answer:

Luke 9:31: They spoke about His departure, which He was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem.

They spoke of His departure - Elijah and Moses wanted to talk about the Cross - the Resurrection – and, eventually, the Ascension, which we celebrate after Easter. Why did Elijah and Moses want to talk about His departure? Because all of the Old Testament - the saints, the prophets, the Law-givers – all were pointing to Jesus who was going to be slain on the Cross, and take on our sins, and give us a home in heaven. I don't have time to go through all the scriptures from the Old Testament today, but they are there! You can google: “Old Testament Scriptures that point to Christ.” And Elijah and Moses, two great giants of the Old Testament story, showed up to talk about it! It must have been a momentous conversation!

Jesus had brought His inner circle – Peter, James, and John – to this momentous event. They were all three awestruck – all were speechless – except for Peter! He said: “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here.”

I understand the dynamic of feeling good, being at a momentous event of the Power of God; I experienced that during the outpouring I mentioned earlier; I didn’t want to leave! During that awesome week, I slept perhaps 3 or 4 hours per night; I would find myself riveted in my seat in the auditorium; I didn’t want to miss anything! Yes, I understand – only a little – what Peter was saying – I did not want to leave the wonderful presence of God in Hughes Auditorium. It was like I was bathed in the love and majesty of God. And I was surrounded by loving people everywhere!

If Peter would have stopped there – “It is good for us to be here” - that would have been great. But then he goes on and says that they ought to build three tabernacles

Now think for a moment what a ridiculous suggestion this was! Peter was saying – essentially – let’s just stay up here on the mountain – forever.

Now, before we get too hard on Simon Peter, let’s remember that the scripture says that he said this because he was so frightened. Have you ever said something stupid when you were afraid? Peter would understand!

The disciples were terrified; This is common with mountaintop experiences – during that outpouring of the Holy Spirit in 1970, I was also aware of my own sin before the holiness of God, and there were moments of fear – but – in the midst of the fear – there was such great love that I wanted to stay – I understand a little bit what Peter was feeling.

Getting back to the story: Again, Peter’s suggestion was so ridiculous that the Heavenly Father said: “This is my Son, whom I love; Listen to Him!”

After this momentous experience, the scripture said, they came down from the mountain.

When I went through that momentous week in 1970, all I wanted to do was stay in Hughes Auditorium; it was such a loving place; but you know what? I had to go back down the mountain – I had to come down the mountain to pursue my academics – work a summer job; that experience was – and is – so precious to me. But you know what? I couldn’t stay there!

For the rest of this message, I want to deal with two questions:

First Question

Why did the disciples have to come down from the mountain?

The disciples had to come down from the mountain because the real work was below; Jesus had invited His inner circle – Peter, James, and John – to witness His Majesty so that they could find strength for the months and years ahead as they worked to help create the church and launch the new wave of the

Kingdom of God, a kingdom beginning with their ministry, a kingdom that would last forever; and, this same kingdom that still exists today will one day come to full flower when Jesus Christ comes again. The Transfiguration is just a glimpse of the mighty Glory of God that will come in blazing Power and Brightness one day. The Bible refers to it as the Second Coming. It will be a great day! On that day, there will be no more suffering, no more crying, no more weeping, no more tears – as John put it in the book of Revelation, Jesus says this at the end of time:

Revelation 21:5: Behold, I make all things new

I would like now to share two truths about mountaintop experiences we may have here about the Presence of God when God feels so real:

Although we can grow from mountaintop experiences, it is in the valley that we really grow and do the work of God.

Peter, James, and John grew in their understanding of Jesus on the mountain; but it was the day-to-day Presence of Jesus in which they grew the most. Eventually, Peter, James, and John all had to suffer for their faith; Peter and James were eventually martyred for their faith; John was exiled by the Roman government to the island of Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, along with three other books.

Even though they came down from the mountain, you have to know that they never forgot the experience; in times of stress and trouble, I am sure that their hearts flew back to that special day in which they saw Jesus in His Glory; I know that in many moments of despair and discouragement in my life, I leaned on Jesus in that moment, and He has never let me down – but – many times – I also thought about that special day in 1970 when I was given the humble privilege of observing and experiencing the Power of God.

And this brings me to another truth about mountaintop experiences:

Mountaintop experiences about God are given to us to remind us of the Power and Majesty of God when times are tough

Second Question

Why did Jesus have to come down from the mountain?

Jesus came down from the mountain because He had to go to the Cross. Elijah and Moses talked to Jesus about it on the Mount of Transfiguration – His coming departure- the Cross, the Resurrection, the Ascension.

Why did Jesus have to go to the Cross? It was the primary reason He came- He came to die.

Although Jesus was the greatest teacher who ever lived, that was not the primary reason He came; Jesus was the greatest miracle worker who ever lived, but that is not primarily why He came; He came to die for you and me

You see, The Bible presents to us a great dilemma; we are the ones who deserve to die. Romans 3:23 says:

Romans 3:23: For all have sinned and come short of the Glory of God

And Romans 6:23 says:

Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death

We all deserve to die for our sins, because God is a Holy God, who cannot stand sin. Many, many Bible verses speak of the holiness of God; one is Psalm 77:13:

Psalm 77:13: Your way, O God, is Holy; what God is great like our God?

If God would receive us in heaven without dealing with our sin, then He would cease to be the Holy God that He is.

But here is the problem – although God cannot stand sin, He loves us. And so, what did He do?

But then we have this wonderful good news in Romans 5:8

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrated His love for us, in that, while we yet still sinners, Christ died for us. Before you and I could lift a finger to help ourselves, Christ died for us.

Why did Jesus have to die? Because your sin – my sin – was so great that God, being a Holy God, could not have us in His Presence otherwise. But God loved us so much that He gave the most precious thing He had – His Son –to die for us.

Now, we must each make a decision. Romans 10:9,10 says:

Romans 10:9-10: If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

The Bible tells us in this passage and many others that we have to make a decision about what we are going to do about this figure whom Peter said was the Christ, the Son of the Living God; we have to make a decision about what we are going to do with this person who shone brightly on that momentous mountaintop experience.

Most reputable historians say that Christ actually died on the Cross. What the Bible tells us, however, is that the Cross is more than an historical event – it is the time in which Satan’s power was broken, the way was made clear to be made right with God – forever – and we can have an eternal home in heaven.

Have you asked this Christ to enter into Your Life? To save you from your sins, to forgive you, to make you a part of His Family? You can ask Him to come into your heart....

Pray the prayer.