

# The Transfiguration of Our Lord

## THE CROSS IS IMPRESSIVE

Mark 9:1-9

### The Transfiguration of Our Lord

Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

2Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. 4And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 6He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" 8Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.

9As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

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## DIAGNOSIS: IMPRESSED BY GREATNESS

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Isn't Greatness Great?*

Mark tells us in the first sentence of his Gospel that Jesus is

the Son of God. Yet all through his Gospel, whenever anyone calls Jesus the Son of God, Jesus tells them to be silent (Mk. 1:25; 3:12; 5:8). A couple of times when Jesus heals people, he tells the witnesses to tell no one (Mk. 5:43; 7:36). Jesus also ordered Peter, James, and John, to tell no one about his transfiguration until after he had risen from the dead. This was not how Jesus was to be known as the Son of God. It was when Jesus died on a cross that a centurion said that Jesus was truly the Son of God. Only then did Jesus not protest or tell him to be silent. People are impressed by great events, by great deeds, by great wealth, by great power. People want God to be impressive. So people worship those who do great deeds, who have great wealth, or great power. People trust the promise of greatness, the promise that they will give us life and worth.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Faithless and Adulterous***

Jesus had to deal with people who desired to worship greatness. Those people who worshipped greatness Jesus called a “faithless generation” (Mk. 9:19). He called them “this adulterous and sinful generation” (Mk. 8:38). God was not known except through the law and the prophets (Moses and Elijah). God had given the law, and God had sent the prophets—the voices of God’s evaluation and judgment. If God is only known through the law and the prophets, then that God caused terror, not trust (“they were terrified”). For the law and the prophets always demand to be listened to, always demand to be followed, and therefore, always judge how well you listened and how well followed. You were terrified by God because you didn’t always listen and you didn’t always follow. Not listening and not following is what the faithless and the adulterous do.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *You Need a Savior***

Even though terrified, Peter offered to honor God, God’s law, and God’s prophet. What else could he do? God was being

impressive at the moment. But there is no life, no freedom from terror in giving such honor. Besides, God did not want honor given to Moses and Elijah. Peter's attention was in the wrong place when it was on Moses and Elijah. Moses and Elijah had always said, "Since you don't trust God, you shall die. You need a savior." The great who have wealth and fame and power eventually die. They cannot give us life and worth. Even when they lived, they did not give us anything. They kept their greatness for themselves. It does them no good either.

## **PROGNOSIS: IMPRESSED BY JESUS ON A CROSS**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) :** *We Are Given Jesus as Our Savior*

God told Peter to not listen to Moses and Elijah, but to listen to his Son, Jesus (v. 7). Jesus was impressive at the moment, with clothes dazzling whiter than anything on earth. But that greatness still only caused Peter, James, John (and us), to be terrified. No, we are not to look at such an impressive Jesus. We are to look and listen to Jesus on a cross. Jesus on a cross frees us from Moses and Elijah, from the law and the prophets. Jesus on a cross frees us from death. That is what Jesus promised. Trust him, unimpressive, not great, just weak, damned, and dead.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) :** *Isn't Jesus Great?*

We cannot trust something so unimpressive as Jesus on a cross. To trust Jesus on a cross is to die to our need for impressive things, to die to wanting to be impressive ourselves, and to die to being impressive through a connection to the impressiveness of others. The Spirit puts to death our desire for greatness by using the promise of Jesus. Our adulterousness—wanting to be mixed up with greatness—dies when connected to the weakness and death of Jesus. But we are also raised up with Jesus into his

life, his forgiveness, and his mercy. This we are assured of by God raising Jesus from the dead, as the young man in the white robe said to the women, "He has been raised; he is not here" (Mk. 16:6). By the Spirit, we trust Jesus.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) :** *We Serve the Greatness of Jesus to Others*

When we trust Jesus, we are no longer concerned about the impressiveness of greatness. Our worth and our life no longer are based on the false promises of great wealth or great success or great fame. We listen to Jesus promise us a life of mercy and forgiveness with God. It may not sound great or impressive, but Jesus is risen. We are free from following the great, and free to give life and worth to others, making them great with our love and service. We are free to serve the people around us. As others look and listen for worth in the greatness of others who do nothing for them, we can serve them with care, with love, with help, and so give them the greatness of Jesus on a cross. We serve others—not just because they are in need—but because they are ones to whom Christ has made a promise. So even if they have no need, we serve them Jesus' promise. And they will have Jesus, who, to God, is the most impressive, and having Jesus, God gives them life and forgiveness.