

It's interesting to compare the beginning of Mark with the beginnings of the other three Gospels. Matthew and Luke open with the birth and infancy narratives of Jesus and support Jesus' special identity with the miraculous nature of His conception and with the extraordinary events that surrounded His birth and early childhood. We are given Gabriel's visit to Mary, Joseph's dream, angels appearing to shepherds, Magi visiting from the East. Matthew and Luke also give rather long genealogies to place Jesus in the proper lineage required for him to be the Jewish Messiah and promised king. John takes it back even further and seeks to establish the pre-existence of Jesus; that is, that He was with God and was God before the creation of the world.

But Mark does not bother with any of the things we find in the beginning of the other gospels. Mark just begins. He begins with Jesus already grown up and on the move. He simply tells us that his story is about Jesus "the Son of God," gives passing note to Jesus' baptism and temptation, and then proceeds with telling the story of how Jesus called disciples and ministered to people. Mark "tells," but makes no effort to prove Jesus' identity; instead, Mark allows Jesus to speak for Himself and to demonstrate His special identity by the extraordinary things He says and does, mostly does.

In my last message from the gospel of Mark, I told you that one of the special features of Mark's gospel is the "Messianic Secret" I suggested how that "secret," serves to build suspense, leading up to the discovery of Jesus as the Messiah. The disciples had been walking with Jesus for some time and had been witnessing His miracles and hearing His teaching. There was much speculation and controversy about Him among the people. In Mark 8:27 Jesus asks His disciples the question, "Who do people say that I am?" They answered, John the Baptist (raised from the dead), Elijah (returned), or one of the other prophets of old. Then Jesus turned the question on them: "But who do you say that I am?" And for once, Peter gets it right; Peter says, "You are the Christ." Peter correctly identifies Jesus as the promised Messiah, the One all Israel had been waiting for, their Savior.

This is the revelation the Gospel of Mark has been building up to throughout the first half of the book. This is the climatic moment,

the "aha!" moment in the Gospel. With Peter's proclamation of Jesus as the Christ, the great "secret" is revealed.

Following this climax in the story there are two problems. Peter has a problem and I had a problem too. As for Peter his newly discovered truth is quickly followed by confusion. Peter "gets it," on the one hand, but misses it on the other. As soon as Jesus begins to talk about the sufferings He must endure and His death on the cross, Peter rejects Jesus' words and by so doing is rejecting God's plan for the salvation of the world. As we said two weeks ago, the disciples "like the good stuff." They like Jesus' power, all the miracles, and His teachings. They relish the idea that He is the One, the Messiah, but they object to His sufferings. As soon as Jesus began to talk about suffering and self-sacrifice, His followers drew back.

Jesus, however, made it clear that His disciples would need to rearrange their thinking. He made it clear that when Peter tried to keep Him from His appointment with the cross, Peter was speaking for Satan. Without Jesus shedding His blood and dying as a sacrifice on the cross, there could be no salvation for anyone. **Peter had a problem with the cross.**

The problem I had as a reader of the gospel was trying to figure out how the event described in our Scripture passage today fits in with Mark's telling of Jesus' story. If the revelation of Jesus as the Christ is the climax of the gospel, and I believe it is, then what is the purpose of the Transfiguration? And, what shall we call it? It is certainly another high point in the gospel. It even happens up on a mountaintop, but if the revealing of the secret is the climax, the Transfiguration has to be something else. Otherwise, it's confusing. The reader doesn't know where to settle. It's kind of like an old dog circling around looking for the right place to lie down and not being able to find it.

At first I was confused about the purpose of the Transfiguration. But, after I thought about this for a while, it came to me. The Transfiguration does not compete with Peter's recognition of Jesus as the Christ as the climax of Mark's gospel; it confirms it. The "Messianic Secret" is one feature of Mark and the "Principle of Confirmation" is another one. The best way to see this principle spelled out for us is to skip ahead to the last chapter of

Mark; Mark 16:20 says of the disciples, "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following."

The Principle of Confirmation is simply this: the word proclaimed by Jesus and then by His disciples is "confirmed," or proven to be true by the miraculous signs given after them. This pattern and principle is established early in Mark's gospel.

For instance, Mark 1:22 tells us that the people who heard Jesus teach were amazed that He taught with such authority. Then in verses 23-26, Mark tells us about Jesus casting a demon out of a man who was possessed. Verse 27 makes the connection between word and action: "The people were all so amazed that they started saying to each other, "What is this? Some kind of new teaching? This man has authority to give orders to the evil spirits, and they obey him!" In other words, the authority He displays in casting out demons confirms the authority of His teachings.

We see it again in the case of the paralyzed man who was let down through the roof into the presence of Jesus. Jesus' first action is to pronounce forgiveness for the man's sins. The Jewish teachers of the Law and Pharisees take exception, saying, "Who can forgive sins but God?" Jesus responds by asking a question: "Which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven you," or take up your bed and walk?" Then Jesus brings healing to the paralyzed man. His miraculous healing is a sign of Jesus' authority to forgive sins. Once again, it is the Principle of Confirmation.

With the Principle of Confirmation in mind, remember where we are in Mark's gospel. Jesus has asked, "Who do you say I am?" Peter has said, "You are the Christ." Then Jesus tells His disciples what it means for Him to be the Christ; He tells them about His coming sufferings and death, but Peter rebukes Him.

Then Mark 9:2-7 say, "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. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 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." (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

The Transfiguration is the sign following and proving the revelation that Jesus is the Christ. Do you remember Moses on Mt. Sinai? He received the Law of God for the people of God, and when he came down from the mountain his face glowed so brightly the people couldn't stand to look upon his face. Jesus also so shines. And, Jesus is greater than Moses; He is the new lawgiver; He gives the one law that is above every other law; namely, that we must love the Lord our God with all our hearts and with all our minds and with all our strength and we must love our neighbors as we love ourselves. And, Elijah is the one who defeated the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. Jesus is greater than Elijah. He has authority over all false gods and over all the power of the Evil One, even over all sin and death. Jesus is Lord of Lords and King of Kings. The Transfiguration is the "sign" that confirms Jesus' identity as the Christ.

It is also interesting to note that the Transfiguration is primarily a visual experience. Peter, James, and John "see" Jesus transfigured; they witness His heavenly glory. They are astounded by what they see. But, there is also a crucial word spoken in the midst of the transfiguration experience: It is a word from God the Father which comes with all the authority of the heavenly throne, and this word is made all the more urgent by its brevity. It's also made all the more urgent by its setting. It comes down to the top of the mountain at the very instant Jesus' heavenly glory is revealed. Speaking of Jesus, God the Father says, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

Do you remember what Peter was doing right before the Transfiguration? Do you remember what were they all doing, and what we were we doing with them? The answer is "quibbling" Peter was quibbling and arguing with Jesus about His call to suffering and sacrifice. The rest were doing the same thing in their hearts. And, the truth be told, we are no different. We too would shrink back from the cross. We don't want to hear or accept the things Jesus is saying, especially when it involves any measure of hardship or pain.

But God the Father has one thing to say to us all: "This is my Son . . . Listen to him!" In other words, don't quibble, don't argue, listen! Hear and obey. It's not our place to try and second-guess God. It's not our place to object to what He has decided to do. It's not our place to tell Him what to do. It is definitely not our place to try to substitute our ideas about how the universe should be run in place of His. We are commanded to listen to Him rather than trying to make Him listen to us. **Jesus Christ (not us) is Lord.**

The question we are asking this morning concerns the Transfiguration. What is the Transfiguration and what is it here for in the gospel of Mark? The answer to this question is threefold: Number one, the Transfiguration is not the climax of the gospel; but, rather, it is the confirmation of Peter's word that Jesus is the Christ. It's the "confirmation;" it is "the sign following," the miraculous sign that confirms the revelation of the word.

Number two; the Transfiguration is a "coronation." I think of David who was hidden away in a sheep's pasture in shepherd's clothes, until Samuel came and anointed him to be king of Israel. I think of young Josiah who was hidden and cared for secretly in the temple courts until the time was ripe for him to be brought out and proclaimed the legitimate King of Judah. So Jesus, who was hidden behind the Messianic Secret is now brought out and crowned King before His disciples.

And, Number three; the Transfiguration is a "megaphone." The fickle human voice that proclaimed Christ as Messiah one minute and argues with Him the next, is replaced by the same thunderous voice that called light from darkness at the beginning of time. That voice proclaims Jesus to be the very beloved Son of God and Lord of all.

The challenge that the Transfiguration leaves with us is communicated by that voice of the Father. Will we allow Jesus to be our Savior? Will we crown Him king of our lives? Will we quit trying to run the show, and follow Him as Lord? Just to remind you, this is what God the Father said about Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration: He said, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!" Will you listen to Him this coming week?

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The Secret Revealed, The Secret Confirmed

Mark 9:1-13

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