

Address on 9th August 2020 – Lessons from Mark's gospel, week 7

Seeing Jesus in a different light The Transfiguration – Mark9:2-13

Introduction

For my 60th birthday my three sons took me to Morocco. I was expecting to spend a week seeing the sights of Marrakesh and relaxing in the old city. The boys had a different idea, however, and in the middle of the week off we set for Imlil, the gateway to the High Atlas Mountains. We were on our way to climb Mount Tubkal, at 4,300m the highest mountain in North Africa. Although not as high as other mountains I had scaled, such as Kilimanjaro, it was hard going at 60 and the boys joke with me that it was a case of two steps forward and one step back on the last section. There was certainly a lot of snow and ice and the air was very thin, but we made it and have the pictures on the summit to prove it.

Jesus on a high mountain

In our reading today we find Jesus and three of his disciples on a mountaintop. The bible doesn't actually tell us which mountain it was and the scholars can't seem to come to any agreement. Some say it must have been Mt Hermon (2,800m), near to Caesarea Philippi where Jesus spent quite a bit of time but others plump for Mt Tabor, a lowly 575m by comparison. It doesn't really matter, I guess.

When I read this story a couple of questions always come to mind. Firstly, why did Jesus take just Peter, James and John with him? No doubt he took them because he wanted them to witness what happened. But why not take all twelve disciples? I don't have an answer to my question. Secondly, How did Peter, James and John know it was Moses and Elijah that appeared on the mountain top to speak with Jesus? There were no photographs in those days. How could they have known what Moses and Elijah looked like? I guess it was divine inspiration, but we don't really know.

The important thing as always is to ask; 'what does this passage have to say to us?' There are three things I want to suggest.

Prayer

The first thing this passage does is remind us of the importance of taking time to meet with God. It is not insignificant how often in the Scriptures we find Jesus withdrawing to a quiet place to pray. We saw this last week when we found him getting into a boat to cross the lake to find some peace and quiet. He didn't get it on that occasion as the crowds followed on foot round the shore, but that was his intention. Today we find him going up a mountain. The point is that it is often in the quiet places that God speaks to us most clearly.

I'm not suggesting that it is impossible to hear God's voice in the hurly burly of modern life, or that we have to take ourselves up a mountain to meet with God, but I do think we need to be intentional about making time for God. Some people set aside a room in their house as a prayer room. Others set aside a time each day, often early in the morning, to read their Bibles and to pray. If we are not intentional about this, we make it much harder to hear God speaking.

Of course, it is not always easy to find peace and quiet. Susannah Wesley, the mother of John and Charles, had 19 children. It is said that when she wanted to pray, she would lift her apron over her head and if the children saw her in this pose, they knew not to disturb her. However we do it, we need to make an effort to listen to God, to be intentional about meeting with him on a daily basis.

Praise

This passage also speaks to us about praise, not praising God, on this occasion, but affirming and praising those we love. When Jesus went to the mountaintop, the disciples heard the voice of the

Father saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love, listen to Him.' The Father affirms the Son. It made me wonder whether I praise my children enough.

Did you ever use the Bible notes Every Day with Jesus, edited by Selwyn Hughes? Years ago, I was at a seminar with Selwyn and he told us that one of his sons, when he grew up, had become a printer. When Selwyn asked his son why he had chosen printing as a career the young man said, 'Well Dad, when we were growing up the thing that always seemed to stress you most was that the printers never seemed to get things done on time. I wanted to do something that would impress you.'

The young man was looking for affirmation from his father. He wanted his father's praise. Even as adults our children want to know that we love them. Do we affirm them enough?

Person of Jesus

This passage speaks to us about prayer and it speaks to us about praise, but most of all it speaks to us about the person of Jesus. This passage is another pointer to Jesus' identity.

When we look at the story of Moses in the Old Testament, we learn that he met with God on Mt Sinai. It was here that he received the 10 commandments. When we read the story of Elijah we learn that he too met with God on a mountain. The angel of God took him to Mt Horeb and there God spoke to him, not in the earthquake, wind or fire, but in a still, small voice. Two of the Old Testament greats met with God on a mountaintop. Now in this story of the Transfiguration, Jesus meets with Moses and Elijah on a mountaintop. What conclusion are we meant to draw? Who did Moses and Elijah meet with on the mountaintop? They met with God? Surely the inference is that Jesus is God in the flesh, meeting with his prophets of old.

In the previous chapter of Mark's gospel, Jesus has asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' and 'Who do you say that I am?' Well, here we have some more proof, if they needed it, that Jesus was God in the flesh, the Messiah, the Son of God. And that's why I called this sermon 'Seeing Jesus in a different light.' They saw him literally in a different light, transfigured, shining before their eyes, but as they pondered this experience it would have added to their understanding of who he was and confirmed for them that he was indeed God in human form.

Summary

This passage tells us something about prayer and reminds us of the need to be intentional if we want to hear God speaking to us.

It reminds us that however old they are our children look to us for affirmation and praise.

Most importantly, it tells us something about the person of Jesus. It confirms who he is, the Son of God, our Saviour.

Prayer

Lord, the disciples saw your glory. May you be glorified in our lives as we seek to draw closer to you and to follow you day by day. Amen

Anthony Smith