

# Transfiguration

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, good morning, everyone. Let me add my welcome to Fraser's. My name is Graham. I'm the pastor here at the church. And let me encourage you to come with me to Mark chapter nine as we get into our Bibles today. Let me encourage you to get the verses in front of you in any way that you can. And as you're turning there, let me tell you about a school friend of mine that I had. His name was Stephen. Stephen was a great lad. But the thing about Stephen was that many people in our year thought that he was a bit strange. Now, just let me give you a little example of that to help you understand why they thought he was a little bit strange.

So there was a time when our school rugby team got to the Scottish schools finals, which is a massive deal, massive deal. And what made it even more of a massive deal was the fact that it was going to be played on the pitches outside Murrayfield. Now, if you're a 14-year-old sporty boy, you can imagine that that is the stuff of dreams. And to add to the excitement even more, there was even a rumour going around that one lucky team would get to change in the Scotland changing room. And so the rugby coach gathers us into the gym hall the week before the tournament. And he says, boys, listen, the tournament's going to be played on a Sunday. And I need to know now, just before I name my squad, I need to know whether any of you have any reason that you think you won't be able to make the team. So straight as a flash, Stephen's hand goes up. And he says, sir, sorry, did you say Sunday?

I think that's me out. And we're all looking at each other in amazement. And he's got an injury that we don't know about. What's the deal here? Why is he pulling out? And then he says, because I'll be at church. And we're all looking at each other in amazement. Did he just say what we thought he said?

But he says, no, I'll be at church. I'll be at church. In our minds, Stephen has got the choice between Murrayfield and the monastery, right? And he's got that decision for one Sunday, one Sunday. And yet he has picked the monastery. We just couldn't understand this as we looked at Stephen. Why would he make this choice? Now, the thing about us is we got absolutely obliterated in that tournament in the first round. So actually there was probably a lot of wisdom in Stephen's choice. But still there I was as a very impressionable 14 year old boy trying to figure out what life was all about. And I'm watching Stephen unashamedly nail his colours to the mast.

And I heard the nicknames that people gave him. And I heard the jokes that people made behind his back. And yet I saw Stephen willingly embrace it all. And I couldn't understand that in my mind. I couldn't figure it out. Given what life was like for him at school because of his choice. Why he would choose Jesus. Now, it's a small example of a big truth that we're going to see in this passage here this morning. As we turn to these verses in Mark's gospel, and the big reality is this, that it costs to follow Jesus. It costs to follow Jesus. In fact, I heard a statistic recently that it's estimated that 55,000 Christians around the world are killed for their faith each year. Now, given that huge number and that big reality, surely the question then becomes, is it worth it? Is it worth it?

[ 3 : 56 ] Well, here is this man called Mark who's written his account of Jesus's life so that we'd understand who Jesus is and what it means to follow him. And at this point in his gospel, he knows that that is the question in the minds of his readers. Come with me and let me show you how this works. Come with me to chapter 8, verse 27.

And there Jesus has just asked his disciples that million dollar question. He's asked them, who do people say that I am? And his disciples start telling him what the people of the world are saying. But Jesus is more interested in what they are thinking. And so Peter launches in kind of out of nowhere here and he declares, Jesus, you are the Christ. You are God's promised saviour king. And just like that, Peter's got it. Ding, ding, ding, ding. The jackpot is going off. He's got it.

But while he's got the title absolutely right, what becomes clear in the text is that he's got that job description of Christ, of Messiah. He's got it all wrong.

So yes, Jesus is God's promised saviour king, but he will save his people not by fighting, but rather by suffering and dying.

And it begins to dawn on Peter that if this is the way of life for Jesus, if his life is cross-shaped as it were, then it dawns on Peter that if he's to follow after Jesus, then this is the way of life that he must now adopt and follow.

[ 5 : 56 ] And the thing is that no one wants to be associated with a sinking ship, do they? I mean, the footsie will tell you each and every day that when people know that a business is going under, what do they do? They sell their shares. They get out of there as soon as they can.

So Peter's coming to grips with the cost of what it means to follow this man, Jesus, this man who for three years Peter has staked his whole life upon following him.

And so Jesus speaks to the crowd and he tells them, verse 34, he says, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, which means stop living according to your way and live it according to my way and take up their cross and follow me.

And here's his loving challenge to all those who are listening in in this crowd. Verse 36, for what good is it for someone to gain the whole world and yet forfeit their soul?

And you have to say those are truly sobering words from Jesus. And I don't know about you, but I had a right good laugh a few weeks ago as somebody in our world who was gaining. I don't know if you saw the photo of the man in America who traveled around buying up all the antibacterial hand wash that he could find, only to be told a few days later that he couldn't sell it.

[ 7 : 23 ] And I love the picture. It was just him with a puzzled expression on his face, standing in front of his garage, filled to the rafters with hand wash. Not so handy-andy. That's what the newspapers should have called him.

But there is someone who spent all of his time and all of his money gathering, hoarding, hoarding, building only for his so-called wisdom to actually in the end be shown to be foolishness.

And what Jesus is asking us all to lovingly consider is lest we too get to the end of our lives and we look back and we think, what was that all about?

You know, it might not be a garage full of hand gel, but it might be a garage for you full of grades, full of promotions, full of money, full of popularity.

And the thing is that these are all things that our hearts pursue because we think that life and purpose is to be found there. And Jesus lovingly says, don't waste your life pursuing things that won't last.

[ 8 : 37 ] And see that I love you enough that I've come to tell you to stop and to think about your soul, to think about eternal things.

And Jesus goes on to talk about life and death and heaven and hell and what happens beyond this life. And surely we have to say, friends, that if ever there was a time in our lives that should prompt us to ask that question, surely it is now.

As the coronavirus has made us all wake up to the fact that it doesn't matter whether you are a prince, whether you are the president, whether you are the prime minister, whether you're a sports star, whether you're a celebrity, whether you're Joe blocks in the street, that every single one of us shares a fragile human body and our lives are but a breath.

Here is Jesus speaking into our situation. Mark wants us to see that it costs to follow Jesus.

It costs to follow this king. But here's the other thing that he wants us to see. And I hope you get this today, that following Jesus is so worth it.

[ 9 : 57 ] Now, to help us see what Mark is showing us in these verses in chapter nine, let me offer you, by way of the simplest sermon outline ever, the three to one of this text, beginning with three men on a mountain.

So here are Peter, here are Jesus' closest three disciples. And they've been led up this mountain by Jesus.

Now, it's important for us to see that detail in the text. So this is not as if they have accidentally stumbled up the mountain here. This is not some orienteering trip gone wrong, like James and John need to brush up on their compass skills.

Jesus has led them up this mountain because he knows they are most likely feeling the weight when they consider the cost of what he has just laid out in front of them.

And Jesus wants them to witness what's about to happen, to help them see that following him is so worth it.

[ 11 : 02 ] And Jesus is transfigured before them. Meaning something of Jesus' full glory is now fully unveiled for them to see.

And you see Mark trying to communicate that to us. Do you see him trying to use his limited human words and metaphors to try and communicate that to us? I don't know what you used to do to try and communicate whiteness.

When you were young, I remember that we used to try and communicate it by talking about something being Daz White. It was the best that we could come up with. Something was Daz White. Well, do you see Mark trying to do the same thing here?

What does he talk about? The whitest that bleach could get something. He's trying to help us see the radiant brightness, the pure, splendid radiance that was Jesus' in this moment.

And for here, in this brief moment in history, these three men catch a glimpse of Jesus' full glory.

[ 12 : 08 ] The glory that he had with God, his father in heaven, before he came to earth. The glory that he set aside as he stooped down, as he humbled himself, as he took on a human body with the express purpose of standing in the place of his people as he dies for their sins on the cross.

And the glory that he will show on the other side of the cross as he rises from the grave. And the glory that the whole world will know and will bow to one day when he returns to judge the world and has the final word on history.

Here is Jesus in all his glory. And if you're a Christian here today, I want you to be encouraged by this glorious picture of Jesus, who the other side of his death and resurrection now lives to intercede for you right now.

That this is the Jesus that holds your life in his hands. And this is what Jesus will be like when we see him. And when he comes in all his glory, this is the Jesus that you and I are waiting for.

Here is the king in all his majesty. What a wonderful truth for us to grasp afresh today in these uncertain times. Here is Jesus in all his glory.

[ 13 : 40 ] And so from three men on the mountain, let's move to consider two figures from the past. Verse four, if you come with me, you see Moses and Elijah appear on the mountain with Jesus, these two big Old Testament figures, as it were representing the whole of the Bible story up to this point, the law and the prophets, the story.

And they appear here with Jesus as if to say, this is what it's all been about. Everything that we said and did, everything in our ministries, everything that happened in our time on earth was pointing to and building towards this, the most glorious of moments.

Because every promise that God made, that he would lovingly and graciously act to rescue his people, that he would deal justly with their sin, that he would make them clean, he would purify them, and he would open heaven's gates so that the peoples of the world could by faith in Jesus Christ, be at peace with and know their creator.

Those promises are about to reach their fulfillment and everything that will happen in the days to follow this in the moment of Jesus' death and resurrection. And I love Peter's response here.

Doesn't know what to do, does he? What does he do? He offers to build tents. Now, I've no idea where he thinks he's getting the kit for that for. Right? I don't imagine there's a mountain warehouse outlet on top of this mountain.

[ 15 : 16 ] This may well be Peter's way of saying that he doesn't want this moment to end. But I reckon more likely, if you think about what's being added here, that this is him recalling that in this moment, he was running around well out of his depth.

That he didn't have a clue what was going on. And that has greatly encouraged me this week as I've thought about that. As one who right now feels so out of his depth, running around trying to understand what's going on, but increasingly coming to see my own helplessness and weakness in this moment.

And we laugh at Peter here, but I think we should see something of ourselves as well. And the call then is we embrace that.

It's not to draw on the inner wells of our emotional and intellectual resilience. Because we know, friends, don't we, how quickly those wells run dry.

Surely the call as we see Peter here and as we see this moment is to throw ourselves on this Jesus, embracing him, forsaking all, running after him, fixing our eyes on him, and daily drawing from the bottomless well of God's grace to us in him.

[ 16 : 46 ] This is about him being who he is. This is about him doing what he's about to do in buying and keeping a sinful fool like me for himself.

This is Jesus. In all his glory. And then finally, we move from two men from the past, two figures from the past, we move to one voice from the heavens.

Verse seven. Do you see verse seven? There appears a dominant cloud in the mountain, the cloud being the biblical symbol of God's presence. And God the Father, do you see, he speaks from heaven about his son.

He says, this is my beloved son. Now it's the same affirmation that the father made about Jesus, his son, at his baptism, back at the start of his ministry.

And now here it is again, almost as it were approaching the end of his earthly ministry. Not so much this time as an encouragement, but as an endorsement.

[ 17 : 58 ] Because look at what is added. Echoing those words we heard, read earlier from Deuteronomy about the true and the final prophet of the Lord that the people have to watch for.

Simply listen to him. Now let me give you some stats about listening. The average person has 27 conversations a day.

Each conversation lasts about 10 minutes, which means that the average person spends four and a half hours a day listening to people. Now you project that forward, you build that out, that means that we spend roughly 68 days a year listening.

In fact, it's estimated that you and I will listen to 80,000 people in our lifetimes. Now that's a lot of voices. It's a lot of opinions. But it begs the question, doesn't it?

Who is the most influential voice in our lives? Who is it that we're listening to? Who is top of that list? Because you see the call of God, our creator here saying, you must make my son Jesus number one on your list.

[ 19 : 16 ] You need to listen to what he says. You need to base your life on his revealed truth. You need to base your life on every word that proceeds from his mouth because he is my son.

And here is heaven's ringing endorsement of Jesus. And all of a sudden, verse eight is back to being just Jesus and the three disciples.

In an instant. And for Peter, James and John, it's back to living cross-shaped lives as they follow this Jesus. Do you know what it costs to follow Jesus?

Remember the question we asked at the start? Is it worth it? Well, just as we close, let me tell you about an interview that I watched recently with Tim Farron, the former leader of the Liberal Democrats.

And he talks about how he used to have a friend at school called Jack. And he described Jack in the interview as a typical college Christian. Whatever that means, I don't know.

[ 20 : 23 ] But that's how he described him, a typical college Christian. whose faith in the eyes of Tim Farron was weird, restrictive and unattractive. And he had absolutely no inclination of exploring the faith of his friend Jack.

And in the interview, he talks about how not long after school, his dad got a job in Singapore. And so the whole family moved over to Singapore. And they were assigned a little house in Singapore by the company.

And the previous family that lived in the house were Christians. And they left behind many things in this house. But one thing they left behind was a collection of Christian books.

And because Tim found himself not being able to speak the language and not having many friends and to avoid him going utterly bored, what he did was he set about reading every book that he could find in the house.

And out of a desire to avoid what he saw as the God stuff on the shelf, he read everything that he could find, including the Winnie the Pooh collection. Until he came to the point where there was nothing left on the shelf apart from those books.

[ 21 : 36 ] And so he picked up and read. And as he did that, in his words, his own words, and perhaps I imagine with Jack at the back of his mind, he says that as he read them, and I quote, it hit me almost with a physical force that this is true.

And if it's true, then nothing else matters. In fact, nothing is even close to mattering. So here's the truth today.

It costs to follow Jesus. It really costs to follow Jesus. So is it worth it? Well, let me just suggest to us as we close that because it's true, because Jesus verifiably rose from the dead, and friends, it is absolutely worth it.

Here is Christ in all his splendid glory. And here is the promise that he makes at the end of Mark chapter 8. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it.

But whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. Let us pray together. So Father, you tell us that your word searches minds and exposes hearts.

[ 23 : 02 ] And so by your spirit, would you right now encourage those who need to be encouraged? Would you still those who need to be stilled? Would you comfort those who need to be comforted?

And would you challenge those of us who need to be challenged? And so as we respond to the call that the Lord Jesus makes on all of our lives, Lord, would you help us to follow him out of a deep love for him and for what he's done for us on the cross.

And so it's in his precious name that we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.