

UNEDITED DRAFT

Discovering the Real Jesus

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Modern intellectuals would like you to believe that the Jesus revealed in the Bible is not the real Jesus. Countless books and television “documentaries” and magazine articles have been produced which claim they have cut through the biases and inaccuracies of the New Testament in order to give you an accurate picture of the real Jesus. And how do they arrive at the “real” Jesus? They start with the presupposition that anything miraculous must be made up. So they throw at every story of healing, or casting out demons, or calming the storm. No dead people were raised, and of course, Jesus himself did not rise from the dead.

They mock people like you and me. They concede there is something to learn from Jesus. But you can only learn it if you first take away all the superstition and myths. Strip away the glory and the miracles and then you can know him for who he truly is. Just a man... a good man... who tried to make a difference in the world by teaching people to love one another.

But I would suggest to you just the opposite is true. Christians don’t tend to attribute too many miracles or too much glory to Jesus. I think instead we tend to do just the opposite. Even we who believe in the miracles... I think we fail to keep before our eyes the divine nature of Christ. We fail to see that this is God in human flesh. We fail to see his true glory, and therefore his true nature.

So I agree, perhaps we do need to set out to discover the real Jesus. And that’s just what we’re going to do today. We will follow Jesus and three of his disciples up a mountain, and there we will discover the real Jesus. And when you discover him, it transforms your faith, your hope, your life.

Jesus, in the verses leading up to what we’re about to study, has been trying to teach the disciples who he really was and why he truly came. In chapter 8 verse 27, Jesus asks the disciples, “Who do people say I am.” Then he asked the disciples: “Who do you say I am.” Peter answered beautifully. “You are the Christ.” Peter and the other disciples believed Jesus truly was the one promised by God from ancient times. He was the anointed one – that’s what Christ means. He was the one who was anointed by God to accomplish God’s great rescue plan for fallen humankind. He would speak the very words of God, he would offer himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin, he would conquer our worst enemies over whom we have no power: sin, death and the power of the devil. All of that is encapsulated in the word “Christ.”

Yet it quickly became evident that the disciples did not yet have a complete understanding of what that meant. Jesus goes on to predict his own suffering, death and resurrection. Peter would hear nothing of that kind of negative talk. It was offensive to him. He was bold enough to rebuke Jesus. To which Jesus responds, “Get behind me, Satan! You do not have I mind the things of God, but the things of men!”

You see, Peter was all about the glory, but not about the suffering. He was all on board for the exaltation, but not for the humiliation. The cross of Jesus was a stumbling block. It continues to be a stumbling block for people today.

They were distraught over the prediction of his death. They would be far more distraught when he was betrayed, arrested, condemned by the Jews. They would be distraught when they themselves would later, as witnesses for Christ, would suffer, be imprisoned, beaten, and eventually die the death of a martyr. Jesus knew that to get through all that lay ahead, they would need to see something: a clear glimpse of his glory.

They were starting to get it, but they didn't yet get it. Who is the real Jesus? At this particular point in time, even the disciples didn't fully understand. And so Jesus showed them. Six days after this conversation took place, they get to see with their own eyes what it meant that Jesus is the Christ. They discovered the real Jesus. Let's follow them on that glorious day and discover the real Jesus too.

I would suggest to you that what we're about to look at is the single greatest miracle of Jesus aside from his resurrection from the dead. Yet, oddly enough if you find a book on the miracles of Jesus, this one is typically not included. More than any other miracle, this one reveals who the real Jesus is. Let's pick it up at Mark 9:2. I'm going to read through it all

2 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. 3 His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. 4 And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

5 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." 6 (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

7 Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

8 Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. 9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Why did this all take place? They needed this. They needed to see the real Jesus, for in seeing the real Jesus could they have confidence in the glory that would follow the suffering. They needed this confidence, this anchor, for their faith.

Let's take a closer look. The timing of Jesus' transfiguration is roughly 6 months before his suffering and death. So from the time of Jesus' baptism until the events we just heard about was about 3 years and there's half a year to go before he's on the cross.

Jesus takes only three of his disciples up this mountain. Sometimes we call them the "inner three." They got to see some things the other disciples did not. Why only three? You'll remember at the end that they were told not to speak of this until after the resurrection. If all had seen, it would have been less likely that this would have been kept under wraps. Why three and not one? In Jewish culture, every matter needed to be established by the testimony of 2 or three witnesses. 1 witness would not have established the fact of the Transfiguration. So Jesus brought three.

Why these three? We can't say for sure. But we do know that Peter would later be a prominent leader in the church, James would be the first of the apostles to be the first martyr – the first to be killed for being a follower of Jesus, and John was the one who would live to old age... the one who could be a lasting witness and testimony to this truth!

What we will see is that not only would there be three earthly witness of Jesus' transfiguration, but there were three heavenly witnesses as well. Heaven and earth saw Jesus' form change and his glory shine forth.

Mark describes that transformation with very few words:

There he was transfigured before them. That word "transfigured" in Greek is: μεταμορφώθη from which we get our word "metamorphosis." His appearance totally changed as he began to shine brightly. **3 His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.** Throughout the Bible, light is a symbol or indication of the presence of God. Indisputably and clearly, Jesus is demonstrated to be God. Oh, there were plenty of indications before this that he was true God. He did many miracles. So he *did* things that only God could do. Yet his appearance was always and only that of a man. There was nothing about he looks that distinguished him from any other human being on the planet... until this moment. Suddenly, the curtain was pulled back and what was hidden in and behind regular human flesh and bones was revealed. The divine nature shined forth and the real Jesus was seen in all his glory and brilliance. Those three men saw what every other human on the planet will only see after we death: the glory of God.

4 And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

These disciples saw more than just Jesus' glory. "And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus." There were heavenly witnesses to this glorious event as well. Why were Elijah and Moses present? Jesus often said that "the Law and the Prophets testify about me." The Old Testament Scriptures were often called "the Law and the Prophets." The Law referred to Moses' writings, that is, the first 5 books of the Bible. The prophets referred to all of the writings of God's prophets. One of the greatest of God's prophets was Elijah. On this mount of transfiguration, Elijah and Moses bore witness to the fact that this Jesus was in fact the promised Messiah whom they had foretold.

And what were they talking about? Mark doesn't say, but Luke's Gospel does. They were talking with him about his departure... that is, about his impending suffering death. Jesus' death was the way of salvation. His death was the unexpected road to glory... glory for Jesus and glory for all that believe in him. What else would they be talking about but God's surprising plan of salvation?

5 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." 6 (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) Now here's a little tip that apparently Peter's mother didn't teach him very well. If you're not sure what to say, silence is okay. You don't *have* to say something. But Peter's character was such that he was bold and often spoke out. Peter loved the glory of Jesus. He was frightened, yet at the same time, he recognized this as a good place to be. Living in the glory of Jesus is as good as it gets. So he suggests they make it last. Let's put up three shelters. One for Jesus one for Moses, one for Elijah. Peter gets an answer... but not from Jesus.

A cloud comes and envelopes all of them. Even a quick look through the Old Testament would tell you what this means. God has come. God is present. And from that cloud comes a voice. **"This is my son whom I love. Listen to him!"** God doesn't say, "This is my prophet, or representative." But this is my Son! As the Son of God, Jesus is true God. As true God, we all must listen to Jesus. God our heavenly Father himself witnesses that Jesus far surpasses the prophets in authority and power because he his true God.

And I wonder if this is a rebuke of Peter. Peter had a habit of speaking more than listening. Remember how about a week earlier, Jesus predicted his death and Peter rebuked Jesus. No, Peter, don't talk. Listen. Listen to Jesus. Let him instruct you, teach you, enlighten you. We don't get to instruct Jesus. We don't get to boss him around and tell him how things will be. Jesus calls the shots. We must listen. And listen carefully.

And so there we have the third heavenly witnesses. Moses, Elijah and then God the Father himself testifying to who the real Jesus truly is.

And just as suddenly as it all began, it ended. The voice was silent. Jesus was the only one standing there. The cloud had lifted. He was no longer shining like the sun.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

It was not yet time for the lasting glory. The cross still lay ahead. But for those disciples and all they would later share it with... and for you and me... this glimpse of his glory reveals the real Jesus.

Conclusion: Jesus did something very rare here. He allows them to move from faith to sight. He let them see a glimpse of what was promised. For a few moments they didn't need to believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. They didn't need to believe that he came down from heaven. They didn't need to believe that he was God in human flesh. They didn't need to believe in the future glory that belongs to all who follow him. They didn't need to *believe* it, because they were *seeing* it with their own eyes. Faith is unnecessary when the reality stands before you. And there before them was the glorified Jesus. There before them was the *real* Jesus. Knowing the *real* Jesus got them through the days of suffering, death, humiliation, heartache and pain.

What an impact this had on the men who saw it!

2 Peter 1:16-18 **16 We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." 18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.**

John 1:14 "We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

And knowing the real Jesus does the same for you and me. The real Jesus is the Son of God in human flesh. He is God with us. He came and did the unthinkable. He lived in this filthy, broken world of ours. He suffered under the effects of sin even as he remained perfect and blameless through every temptation. He suffered and died on a cross in unbelievable shame and humility. He rose on the third day, proving his victory. And now you live as his follower and disciple. You live in a filthy, broken world. You suffer under the effects of sin. You see and experience suffering and pain. You see death all around you, and one day it will be you.

But we do not lose heart, because today we have discovered the real Jesus. We have seen his glory. We know his victory. And it is complete. This world is not the end. There is an eternal life to come. WE have seen his glory, and we've gotten a glimpse of the glory we will live in for all eternity. Go today in peace and joy, for you have discovered the REAL JESUS. And he is your Savior and King. Amen.