



Mark 9:2-9 - <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. <sup>4</sup> And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup> 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." <sup>6</sup> (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) <sup>7</sup> Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" <sup>8</sup> Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. <sup>9</sup> 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.

*Looking for glory? Listen to Jesus!*



*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*  
(John 1:14)

When your expectations don't match your experience, it can be hard to handle. Have your expectations ever let you down? A few years ago, I went through the process of buying a car. The engine cradle on my 1997 Buick LeSabre (the Ship of Dreams) had rusted out and left me without a car. As hard as it was to say goodbye to the only car I had ever owned, I knew I needed to move on, so I began the search. I scoured the internet looking for cars. I got so familiar with websites like Kelly Blue Book and Edmunds and Car Gurus that I probably could've navigated them in my sleep. I looked at pictures of cars on dealership sites, descriptions in classified ads, and I even treaded the sometimes murky waters of Craigslist. It seemed like this process would never end. And then I found it – just the kind of car I was looking for. The pictures and description on the website were impressive. The price was decent, or at least negotiable. This was going to be my car. So I set up a test drive. Is it weird that I was kind of nervous? I had finally found this rare creature, this unicorn – I had finally harpooned my white whale, my perfect car! So, with butterflies in my stomach, I showed up at the dealership. I got in the car and almost immediately my expectations were shattered. Rust on the entire underbody of the car, a broken driver's seat, cigarette burns on the upholstery, and to top it all off the thing didn't even start. So, things were going great. Needless to say, I high-tailed it off that dealer's lot and did not purchase that car. My expectations had let me down. Based on all the homework I had done and all the research I had poured my effort into, this was going to be the car for me. But at the end of the day I realized, I got myself hoping for this car to be just the way I wanted it to be – which may or may not have matched up with what it actually was.

A simple example, but I think you can relate. When your expectations don't match your experience, it can be hard to handle, and maybe even devastating. You expected your marriage to be nothing but a smooth ride down the road of life, off into the sunset, but it didn't take long for the road bumps and potholes to shake your confidence. Lies, loss of trust, and a head full of bad memories leave you wondering where that "loving feeling" has disappeared to. When you had children, you expected a "Leave it to Beaver," Norman Rockwell painting kind of familial bliss, but it didn't happen. Now the relationship is strained, the kids have walked away from you and maybe from the church. Expectations not matching experience can be devastating. It can be hard enough when our expectations don't match our experience when it comes to relationships with other people, but on some level, I think we can get our heads around the interpersonal relationships. Sinners sin, and when you put two or more sinful people together, there's bound to be trouble. But what happens when expectations don't match experience in your relationship with God? When you have to verbally remind yourself, *I know God loves me*, but then follow the questions, *So why is he letting me go through this and it seems like he's so far away? I know that God is all-glorious, so why do I always seem so defeated? There are so many voices out there, many even claiming to speak in his name, so where do I find the truth? Why is the church that bears Christ's name always looking like it's on life support and the false teachers of the world amass thousands of followers?*

If your expectations have ever let you down, and you've mulled over some questions like these, you're in good company. Jesus' disciples had some expectations about the direction of Jesus' ministry and their place in it, but were quickly learning that their experience would be vastly different. Instead of teaching to crowds of thousands and performing miracles before the eyes of the world, Jesus took his disciples aside and told them in no uncertain terms, **The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.** What? What about the kingdom you came to establish, Jesus? What about those Romans running roughshod over our national identity as Israelites? The ministry



of Jesus was going down a road that the disciples weren't expecting, and Peter didn't like it one bit. **Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him.** Peter scolded Jesus for talking this way! *Never, Lord! This will never happen to you!* The thought of the cross was appalling to Peter – there's no glory in this! Jesus told Peter to send that idea straight back to hell where it came from. But Jesus didn't stop there. He kept going. In fact, **If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.** Peter had just made the beautiful confession, **You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!**, but now refused to see that the cross is the way the Christ accomplishes his mission. Maybe that's why Jesus took Peter with him, along with James and John, up the mountain by themselves. Here, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter was going to learn an important truth that we'll do well to remember during the coming days of Lent: The glory of God and the suffering and shame of the cross are not mutually exclusive truths. In fact, they go hand in hand.

**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.** On top of the mountain, the veil of humility was pulled back, and those three disciples caught a good look at the divine glory of the Son of God. Peter's words seemed to ring never truer, this is the Christ, the Son of the living God! Can you imagine the sight? Words hardly seem to do it justice – clothes like lightning, such a radiant face it looked like Jesus opened his mouth and swallowed the sun! Now all their expectations about Jesus were being realized. On this mountaintop, there was no talk of rejection, of suffering, of a cross – just glory! Even though he was scared out of his mind by this sight, struck completely speechless, Peter still managed to say something. He voiced his "knee-jerk" reaction, which sometimes are the most telling: **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.** Maybe given the context of these words, we can sort of understand Peter's rationale. He had made his bold confession of Jesus as the Christ, but couldn't stomach the thought of the shame and suffering of the cross. In his mind, here's the way God's glory would be shown – in a raw display of divine power. So it makes some sense that Peter wanted to stay. But his desire was built on a faulty assumption. Peter wanted to find God's glory in the way Peter determined, not in the way God determines.

For as old as that struggle is, it sounds remarkably modern, doesn't it? When our expectations don't match our experience, it can be devastating. The easiest way for that to happen is to try to find God's glory in ways and places that *we* determine, not God. Do you ever find yourself wishing that things in your life, or your work, or your church would simply be "better"? As if to say, *Come on God, I know I can't win 'em all, but a little vindication every once in a while would be nice!* So I start to envy that perfect looking family on Facebook – thinking that if I could get my spouse and kids to that level, I'd feel more victorious, more glorious. I look at my former schoolmates – none of whom were as gifted as me – and they seem to be advancing so much faster and farther than I am. If I could only achieve *that* level or *that* paycheck, then I'd be living the victorious life. I know Jesus promised trouble in the world, especially for his church, but I look at that church down the road that doesn't seem to have all that much regard for a clear stand on the Word of God, and everything seems to be going right for them. What gives? If only we could look more like them, then we'd be living the victorious and glorious life. Our Savior Jesus patiently reminds us, *first the cross, then the crown*, but we want to skip the hard stuff. God forgive us for looking for glory in all the wrong places! And he does, for Jesus' sake.

It might seem like an no-brainer question to ask about the Transfiguration, but I'll risk it: on the Mount of Transfiguration, where's the glory? Sounds obvious, doesn't it? Right there in front of your eyes – burning brighter than the sun, talking with Moses and Elijah – there's the glory! And while all that's true, I would contend that's not where the *true* glory lies in this account. The true glory of the Transfiguration of our Lord wasn't in that he stayed up there on the top of the mountain, but that he came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, laying aside his



glory, only to climb another hill, the one shaped like a skull – Calvary. It’s on that mountain where he took every one of your sins and mine, and paid for them with his own life. There you see the true glory of the Son of God – in what looks like shame, humiliation, and defeat. In order to reveal himself, God hides himself. It sounds so counter-intuitive, but it’s how God operates. In our second lesson, Paul wrote, **God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.** By nature, we look for glory in all the wrong places. By nature we invent our own gods, but in Christ God breaks through and proclaims to you and me and anyone who will listen the true God, and where the true glory of God is to be found – only in the cross and empty tomb of Christ. Again, it sounds like the height of folly, but God’s ways are not our ways. And, grace upon grace, he still gives us glimpses at his glory. He lifts the blindfold of your human situation and allows you to peer into his gracious, glorious heart. With some splashes of water and word of promise, God adopts his children into his family in the waters of Baptism; with bread and wine and the promise of Christ, *this is my body, my blood, for you*; with his word of forgiveness spoken into your ears – God shows you his glory and beckons you to see the reality of who you are in Christ.

When expectations don’t match experience, it can be hard. In a world where I sometimes feel abandoned, where can I turn? When the church, corporately, and I, personally, seem to meet defeat at every corner, what then? At a time when there are so many competing voices claiming truth or a complete absence of it, how do I know which ones to tune out and which to turn up? Let’s hear God the Father’s answer to those questions. **Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”** What’s the secret to living in a world where experience rarely matches expectation? Listen to Jesus! In his word he promises you that you’re never alone, because he’s by your side. Listen to Jesus! He promises you that your labor in the Lord is never in vain. Listen to Jesus! He promises you unparalleled access to the Way, the Truth, and the Life – so listen up! So, if you get a promotion and a raise, and now you’re finally able to take care of your family the way you think you should be able to – give thanks to God! But that’s not where glory is found. If next Sunday, there are 1,000 brand new people crammed into this sanctuary, hungry for the word of God, eager to pitch in, and wanting to give to support this ministry – give thanks to God! But that’s not where glory is found. If, at the end of this month, your family budget features some numbers in black instead of red – give thanks to God! But that’s not where glory is found. Today, Jesus takes us up the Mount of Transfiguration and gives us a glimpse of heavenly glory to encourage us as we carry our cross following him. He gives us a glimpse of glory to show us where his true glory is found – in the cross of Calvary, where he paid for your every sin; in his empty tomb where he walked out and left behind your death and punishment. Jesus gives us a glimpse of glory to remind us of our eternal home with him in heaven. That’s his promise, and you can take it to the bank! Looking for glory? Listen to Jesus!

Amen

*To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.*

*(Jude 24-25)*