

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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This Is My Beloved

Mark 9:2-13

Key verse: “Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!’” (Mark 9:7)

When U.S. gymnast Carly Patterson won the silver medal at the world gymnastics championship in 2003, a former champion took notice. Former Olympian Mary Lou Retton sent Carly a poster on which she had written: “I saw you win silver at the worlds, but I’ll see gold on you in Athens.”

Carly hung that poster on her bedroom wall as motivation for the arduous training she would have to endure for the Olympic games. At those Olympics, Carly won gold in the all-around gymnastics competition. Afterward, the first person she called was Mary Lou Retton (as reported in *Sports Illustrated*, 8-30-04). The training was hard, but the hope of future glory gave inspiration to endure.

Jesus had set his face toward Jerusalem to suffer there and die. He had told the disciples that these things must take place. Yet, they could not fully comprehend how or why the Messiah would suffer and die. What happened on the mountain of transfiguration would serve as preparation and motivation for the ordeal of Calvary. The transfiguration would serve as preparation and motivation for both Jesus and the disciples....

Jesus took with Him to the mountain Peter, James, and John, who represented Jesus’ “inner circle” of disciples. There Jesus was “transfigured before them” (v. 2). We cannot know exactly what happened in the transfiguration. But in some way Jesus was changed into a glorified state. His purity and divinity shone through so that “his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them” (v. 3)

Mark tells us that Moses and Elijah appeared there and talked with Jesus (v. 4). Moses was the giver of the Old Testament Law. Elijah was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. Mark does not tell us what these three persons talked about, but Luke 9:30-31 says they talked about Jesus’ death and resurrection, his “departure.” Though gloriously transfigured, Jesus was still human. He needed assurance that the path of suffering and death which he had chosen was the right path. To have Moses and Elijah meet and talk with him must have encouraged Jesus as he moved closer to the cross.

Even more encouraging to Jesus must have been the words that God the Father spoke: “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” (v. 7). Everyone needs a parent’s approval and approbation. This experience on the mountain strengthened Jesus for the ordeal of suffering and death that awaited him. The writer of Hebrews said of Jesus “for the joy set before him” [he] “endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:2).

The three disciples did not fully understand either the transfiguration or the idea of a suffering Messiah. This is obvious based on the questions they continued to ask: “So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean” (v. 10). Although their understanding was lacking, what happened that day on the mountain would prepare the disciples to face the dark valley of Jesus’ suffering and death.

Years later, Peter would recall the transfiguration as a transformative experience in his life and ministry: “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. 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’” (2 Peter 1:16-17).

Life is not easy. Faithfulness to God can be costly. We need our own “mountaintop experiences” with God in order to endure life’s dark valleys. We need to remember that “there is no crown without a cross” and on the other side of death there is life abundant!

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