

Introduction

Discussing why seeing movies like the Diary of Anne Frank, Schinder's List, and the Boy in the Striped Pajamas, or seeing pictures that depict the horrors of the Holocaust, even when they terribly upset us is important---sometimes seeing things actually has a much greater impact on us than simply learning or hearing about them. This was the case in the recent movie Unplanned, the real life story of Abby Johnson who became the youngest abortion clinic director in the history of Planned Parenthood. She had an abortion herself, but it wasn't until she participated in an abortion on another woman where she witnessed—saw with her own eyes—the horror of what was happening to that innocent life, and ultimately changed her mind.

1. Seeing is almost always more powerful than hearing, and even then sometimes it takes a while before things really sink in
2. We have an example of that in our passage today
3. Throughout His ministry, Jesus continued to reveal Himself as Messiah and the Son of God through His teaching and the miracles He performed.
4. However, many still didn't know what to make of Him, or come to fully understand who He was, including His closest disciples
5. In our passage today we come to one of the most amazing events in the life of Jesus—His transfiguration where three of his closest disciples actually got to see something with their own eyes that few this side of death have ever seen
6. As we look into Mark 9 we will see three specific purposes for the transfiguration

A. The first purpose of the transfiguration was to reveal the true nature and identity of Jesus (9:1-3)

1. A week earlier, after Peter's confession and Jesus's teaching on what He must suffer, Jesus prophesied this event (1): **“And Jesus was saying to them, ‘Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.’”**
 - a. This event would be reserved for only **“some”** of His disciples—not all of them would get a chance to experience it
 - b. These few would see what others would not see until after their deaths
 - c. Mark reports this event as seeing **“the kingdom of God having come [perfect tense] with power”** which is a bit vague
 - d. Matthew gives us more insight (Matthew 16:28): **“the Son of Man coming in His kingdom”**
 - e. There are some who believe that Jesus was referring to His resurrection, others to His second coming when He returns in glory, but it's clear based on the context that Jesus was referring to His transfiguration
2. Peter, James and John are granted a glimpse into Jesus's pre-incarnate glory as the Son of God (2-3): **“Six days later, Jesus *took with Him Peter and James and John, and *brought them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them;”**
 - a. When Jesus came to Earth He took on human flesh and appeared as a man—READ Philippians 2:5-8

- b. However, here before these three men He was transformed into His former glory for a brief moment:
 - 1) The Greek word translated “**transfigured**” here is metamorphothe which means to change form—it is where we get our word metamorphosis from
 - 2) So, according to Mark, Jesus literally changed form “**before them**”—before their very eyes!
 - 3) Mark says that “**His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them**” (3)
 - 4) Luke states that “**His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming**” (Luke 9:29)
 - 5) Matthew describes it this way, “**His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light**” (Matthew 17:3)

- c. As far as I can tell, the Bible only records three other living human beings who were given this privilege—Moses, Isaiah and Stephen:
 - 1) Moses saw the “backside” of the pre-incarnate Son of God in Exodus 33
 - 2) Isaiah saw the pre-incarnate Son of God sitting on His throne in glory (Isaiah 6:1-5)
 - 3) Stephen saw the post-resurrection Jesus standing at the right hand of God right before he died as he was being stoned (Acts 7:55)
 - 4) Some suggest that Paul may have also see Jesus in this way, but the evidence isn’t conclusive:
 - a) On the road to Demascus Paul was knocked off his horse after seeing a blinding light from heaven and hearing the voice of Jesus, but it doesn’t say whether he saw Jesus—in fact, it says that he was blinded (Acts 9)
 - b) Paul’s description of being taken up into the third heavens includes only what he heard, not what he saw (2 Corinthians 12)
 - 5) John was privileged to see Christ a second time in his vision while on Patmos (Revelation 1:9-18)

- 3. You and I have never had the opportunity to physically witness Jesus Christ in this way, but we do have reliable historical eye witness accounts from those who did, which means we can be assured that Jesus Christ is exactly who He claimed to be

B. The second purpose of the transfiguration was to establish Jesus as the new authority (9:4-8)

- 1. Prior to Jesus Christ’s ministry, the Law and the Prophets—essentially the Old Testament scriptures—were the religious authority
- 2. However, the ultimate purpose of the Law was to serve as a tutor that would lead us to Jesus Christ and He has become both the object of our faith and the authority over it (Galatians 3:24)
- 3. In many respects, we see this transition pictured here in the transfiguration:
 - a. Notice that Jesus appears with two individuals: Moses and Elijah (4): “**Elijah appeared to them along with Moses;**”--Together they represent the Law and the Prophets or the Old Testament religious system
 - b. Notice also that Moses and Elijah are both talking with Jesus (4b): “**and they were talking with Jesus.**”
 - 1) Remarkably, Luke tells us exactly what they were talking about (Luke 9:30-31): “**And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who,**

appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.”

- 2) They were speaking about the end of His earthly ministry—his departure—which is clearly a reference to his death, burial and resurrection
 - 3) However, more significantly, this act would ultimately serve to fulfill the Law and thus complete it’s purpose (Matthew 5:17)
- c. Even though Peter, James and John were apparently able to hear the conversation, they didn’t grasp its significance:
- 1) The text says they didn’t know how to respond, likely because they didn’t understand (which comes out in v. 9-13)
 - 2) They were also terrified
 - 3) Ultimately, not knowing what to do or say, Peter offers to make some shelters for Jesus, Moses and Elijah (5): **“Peter *said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified.”**
 - a) Peter apparently assumed Moses and Elijah were here to stay
 - b) It’s possible in light of the question we’ll see in v. 9 that they believed the appearance of Elijah meant he was back to restore all things as taught by the scribes
 - 4) What the disciples didn’t understand is that the old religious system—the Law and the Prophets—were no longer the authority; Jesus was now the authority (7): **“Then a cloud formed overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, ‘this is My beloved Son, listen to Him! All at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone.’”**
 - a) Just as He did at Jesus’s baptism, God identifies Jesus as His Son
 - b) And as the Son, He is now the authority and they are to **“listen to Him”**—obedience is implied
4. So, the second purpose of the transfiguration was to reveal the shift away from the authority of the Old Testament Law to the new authority of Jesus Christ

C. A third purpose of the transfiguration was to confirm that Jesus’s death and suffering were part of God’s redemptive plan (9:9-13)

1. When Jesus is making His way down the mountain with His disciples he orders them not to tell anyone about what they just saw until after He rose from the dead (9): **“As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead.”**
 - a. It’s possible the reason was because they simply did not yet understand what they had witnessed or what it all meant (10): **“They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant.”**
 - 1) The general consensus among Jews was that when Messiah came, He would conquer Rome and establish His kingdom
 - 2) The concept of a suffering Messiah that would be rejected, let alone killed, was completely foreign to most
 - 3) Peter, James and John obviously struggled with this as well as they debated exactly what Jesus meant by talking of his death and resurrection

- b. Their understanding wouldn't mature until after the resurrection:
 - 1) In fact, John begins his gospel with recounting the transfiguration as proof that Jesus was God in the flesh (John 1:14): **“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”**
 - 2) Peter used his eyewitness of the transfiguration as proof of the Gospel and the validity of his preaching and teaching (2 Peter 1:16-18)

- 2. This led to another question by the three Apostles (11): **“They asked Him, saying, ‘Why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’”**
 - a. The scribes taught that before Messiah would come, Elijah would come and prepare people for the Messiah through repentance
 - b. Some even taught that the Messiah wouldn't know he was the Messiah until He was anointed by Elijah
 - c. Seeing Elijah on the mountain with Jesus may very well have been interpreted by Peter, James and John as that event
 - d. So, their question to Jesus is actually an objection to His claim that He must die and resurrect—in other words they are saying, “Wait a minute Jesus. The scribes teach that Elijah is going to come and anoint the Messiah and restore all things. We just saw him which means that time is here and now. How can you then say that you must die?”

- 3. Jesus's answer once again reveals that God's plan requires that He suffer (12-13): **“And He said to them, ‘Elijah does first come and restore all things. And yet how is it written of the Son of Man that He will suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I say to you that Elijah has indeed come, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him.’”**
 - a. They were right that Elijah must come first and restore all things
 - b. However, the Scripture also prophecy that the Son of Man would have to suffer and be treated with contempt
 - c. Elijah did come (in the form of John the Baptist) and prepared the way for Messiah and they mistreated him as well
 - d. The implication is that just as they mistreated John the Baptist, they will do so to Jesus

- 4. So, the third purpose of the transfiguration was to assure Jesus's followers that His death, burial and resurrection were a part of God's redemptive plan all along

Serene Jones, President of Union Theological Seminary in New York:

“When you look in the Gospels, the stories are all over the place. There's no resurrection story in Mark, just an empty tomb. Those who claim to know whether or not it happened are kidding themselves,” Jones said. “... Crucifixion is not something that God is orchestrating from upstairs. The pervasive idea of an abusive God-father who sends his own kid to the cross so God could forgive people is nuts. For me, the cross is an enactment of our human hatred. But what happens on Easter is the triumph of love in the midst of suffering. Isn't that reason for hope?”