

## THE TRANSFIGURATION CODE

### Mark 9:2-9

Secret codes, mysterious symbols, hidden meanings. Don't you love this stuff?

Did anybody have a Secret Decoder Ring growing up? Or a decoder badge? There's a scene in the movie *A Christmas Story* where Ralphie and his brother use their decoder badges to decode a message from Little Orphan Annie: "Be sure to drink your Ovaltine."

Some of the songs that you know contain secret codes. Historians say that the African American spirituals sung by the slaves were really coded messages about how to escape:

- "The Gospel Train" – a reference to the Underground Railroad
- "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" – also about the Underground Railroad
- "Steal Away" – describes how to sneak off at night
- "Wade in the Water" – tells you to use creeks and rivers to hide your scent from bloodhounds
- "Follow the Drinkin' Gourd" – a reference to the Big Dipper in the sky, which points north

Some people believe that the song *The 12 Days of Christmas* is really a coded message about Roman Catholic doctrine in a time when Catholicism was outlawed.

Secret codes have changed history. There's a movie out right now called *The Imitation Game* about the Enigma Code that the Germans used during World War 2, and the man who broke the code and saved millions of lives.

We are fascinated with codes. A few years ago, there was a very popular novel called *The Da Vinci Code*, which said that Jesus was really married to Mary Magdalene, and the church tried to cover it up (because the church hates women), and there are coded messages everywhere that point to this shocking truth, including the *Mona Lisa*, and Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, and (not kidding) the Little Mermaid's red hair.

As something of a biblical scholar, I promise you that *The Da Vinci Code* is 100% not accurate. But today I'm going to talk about a different code—a code that's completely accurate—a code you need to know about. This one is called "The Transfiguration Code"

**Let's look at Mark 9, and as we walk through it, we're going to crack the code:**

<sup>2</sup> Six days later,

OK, hang on – “six days later” – what happened six days *earlier*? That’s part of cracking the code.

What happened 6 days earlier was that Jesus took the disciples to a place called Caesarea Philippi. And he asked them the question, “Who do you say that I am?” And Peter stepped up to the plate and said, “You’re the one we’ve been waiting for! You’re the Messiah!”

And that was the right answer, but Peter didn’t know what it meant. Like most Jewish people, Peter thought the Messiah was a warrior king who would raise up an army and defeat the Romans and restore the Holy Land to Israel.

So imagine Peter’s surprise when Jesus starts talking about death and suffering and being rejected by the chief priests. And Peter pulls Jesus aside and says, “Lord, this will never happen to you!”

And Jesus’ response is rather pointed:

“Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” --Mark 8:33

And then to make things worse, Jesus calls together the whole crowd and says,

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

--Mark 8:34-35

Again, this is not what the disciples want to hear. They want to hear victory and glory and defeat of the enemy.

So for six days they’re chewing on this, mulling it over and thinking, “What have we gotten ourselves into? We thought we’d found the Messiah, and this guy wants to go to Jerusalem and die? What kind of Messiah is that?”

For six days they thought about that, and then...

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. --Mark 9:2, NRSV

Now here’s the thing about mountains: Mountains are where you go to meet with God.

- Abraham was tested on a mountain
- Moses saw the burning bush on a mountain
- Moses received the Ten Commandments on a mountain
- Elijah heard the still, small voice of God on a mountain

Jesus is taking his three best friends up on a mountain. That tells us that something special is about to happen

And this is what it is:

And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup> and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.

Dazzling white clothes –what does that mean? Well, have you ever watched the trailer for a movie? You're sitting there in a theater and they show you a preview of a movie that's coming up? This is a preview of the resurrection. This is what Jesus is gonna look like when he rises from the dead

God is saying, "Look, the suffering and the death and the rejection that you're about to see – that's not all there is –something grand and glorious is coming. Yes, the cross is going to be horrible, but then there's going to be the resurrection."

And maybe right now, today, God is saying to you, "Look, I know what you're going through right now is horrible, but it's not all there is. Easter's coming. Better days are ahead. Glory and resurrection are on the way."

The dazzling white clothes are a preview of the resurrection.

But there's more. Verse 4:

<sup>4</sup> And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

Now, whoa – what are these guys doing here? Well, Moses was the great lawgiver. The first five books of the Bible are referred to as the Books of Moses, and they're called the Torah, which means "The Law." And Elijah was God's greatest prophet.

So Moses represents the Law, and Elijah represents the prophets. And for the Jewish people that's the whole Bible – the Law and the Prophets. So this is God's way of saying that the entire Bible is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. All of God's dealings with humankind are brought together in this one man

Now look at verse 7:

**7 Then a cloud overshadowed them,**

The cloud is a symbol of the presence of God:

- God led the Israelites through the desert in a pillar of cloud
- God spoke to Moses in a cloud
- When Solomon built the Temple, God's glory filled the temple in the form of a cloud

The cloud means the presence of God—

**and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"**

Ah – that's what all of this has been leading up to. Remember the question Jesus asked, six days earlier at Caesarea Philippi? "Who do you say I am?" And Peter said, "The Messiah," and Jesus said, "The Messiah's gonna suffer," and Peter said, "No you're not," and Jesus said, "Yes I am, and you better get with the program, 'cause if you follow me, you're gonna suffer too."

And to drive home the point, Jesus takes Peter up on a mountain, into the presence of God, so he can hear God say, "Jesus is right. He *is* my Son. And yes, he's going to suffer. But that's not all there is. His suffering will lead to glory. His death will lead to resurrection."

God says, "This is my Son—so when he talks about suffering and death and resurrection, listen to him!"

And as soon as God says that, it's over. Verse 8:

**8 Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.**

The cloud disappears, and Moses and Elijah disappear, and Jesus' clothes go back to being dirty and dingy, and once again, Jesus looks like a normal human being. Except now they know he's not. He's not a normal human being. Yes, he *is* human, but he's also the Son of God, who emptied himself and became a servant, so he could give his life as a ransom for many.

**AND HERE'S WHAT THIS MEANS TO YOU – Three things:**

### 1- Do you know Jesus as he is revealed in the transfiguration?

In other words, do you know Jesus as the Son of God who suffered, died, and rose again to save YOU? Have you made a conscious decision to put your faith in this man who's more than a man?

**The Transfiguration Code tells us** that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. All of God's dealings with humankind are brought together in this one man. And now he stands before you and says, "*Who do you say I am?*"

There are a lot of important questions you have to answer during your lifetime:

- What are you gonna do for a job?
- Where are you gonna go to college?
- Who are you gonna marry?
- Which ACC team are you gonna pull for?

There are a lot of important questions, but the most important is the one Jesus asks: "*Who do you say I am?*" Your answer to that question changes everything.

***\*Do you know Jesus as he is revealed in the Transfiguration?***

### 2- Suffering does not have the last word.

Remember that the transfiguration happens right after Jesus predicts his death, and right before he starts on the road to Jerusalem. He's about to enter a time of horrible suffering, but before that starts, he and the disciples get a preview of the glory that's coming.

**The Transfiguration Code says** that whatever you're going through right now is not all there is. There's hope. Even in the midst of great pain, God shows up and says, "Look, here's a preview of better things to come."

***\*Your suffering does not have the last word.***

### 3- You don't get to stay on the mountain.

Look at verse 5:

<sup>5</sup> Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

In other words, Peter says, “Let’s stay here! Let’s camp out! Let’s just hang out and bask in the glory of this mountain top experience!”

But you don’t get to do that. Eventually you have to go back down the mountain, to where there are problems, and life is hard, and you have to face the same everyday struggles.

Now, don’t get me wrong: **The Transfiguration Code** shows us that mountain top experiences are important--because it’s on the mountain top where we see Jesus in a new way!

I hope you’ve had some mountain top experiences in your life—maybe a spiritual retreat like Kairos or Walk to Emmaus or Presbyterian Pilgrimage or Arise—maybe a revival meeting, or a youth beach trip, or a really powerful worship service.

I hope you’ve had some mountain tops, but you have to understand –

*-The purpose of mountaintops is to help us see Jesus in a new way, SO THAT we can follow him back down the mountain, and towards the cross.*

Mountain tops are the exception, not the norm. They’re designed to prepare us. They’re designed to strengthen us. They’re designed to give us what we need to deal with everyday life.

Mountain tops are where we go to meet with God, and get a fresh vision that keeps us going when we come back down.

***\*But you don’t get to stay on the mountain.***

SO – there’s the Da Vinci Code, the Enigma Code, the Little Orphan Annie code. But the Transfiguration Code is the one you really need to know:

1. Because it shows you who Jesus really is
2. And it promises you that your suffering does not have the last word
3. And it gives you a fresh vision that prepares you to come down the mountain and follow Jesus to the cross.