

MARK 9:2-13  
THE GLORY OF GOD

“In our world too a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world.” (CS Lewis; *The Last Battle*) What does that mean? How does that matter? Let me ask you what you really believe about Jesus? I don’t want you to repeat what you think I’d want you to say, but what do you really understand? The truth is, this is such a basic question for Christians, such an important question for our faith and for the Church. Perhaps you’ve never thought about it before in this kind of way; perhaps you’ve taken for granted that what the minister says is right, but you don’t really understand why he’d make such a fuss. We’ve seen the stories of Jesus as a kind, compassionate man who helps and heals, but that doesn’t make Him bigger than the whole world; that makes him a kind man, perhaps with special powers! Is that all He is? A kind man who does good things in the world? Someone who wants us to follow in His footsteps and do kind things to other people? Does it matter?

Why does this story of Jesus being changed matter? It is all about Jesus’ true identity! There is so much spoken today about “identity” – who am I really? One of the songs of the moment is from the film *The Greatest Showman*; the song is “This is me”, and is all about identity and who I am. Identity theft is a huge crime issue for the world, when people lose their documents and someone else steals that identity for some kind of criminal purpose, to take money from a bank or get a passport in a wrong name. We’re not physically assaulted, but those who have been victims of identity theft feel as if they have been violated and that hurts. Young people are trying to establish “who they are” as they grow up: “what kind of person will I be? What will I like? What work might I want to do?” Bullying is so often about making fun of that identity; “you are different; we don’t like who you are; you don’t fit in with rest of us!” Some of you tell me that only as you have got older have you worked out who you really are, because for so long you have been made to conform to an identity that’s not really you. This is all about the real, true identity of Jesus, who He is and what He came to do. It matters that we grasp that and believe!

Something “bigger than the whole world”? It didn’t feel that way at the start; it felt just like a normal day with Jesus; we’re climbing a mountain. But the day was about to explode in a dazzling array of light and glory as Jesus pulled back the curtain for just a moment to reveal His true self to these three frightened disciples. They were all alone: this was an experience only three people saw. Later, Peter wrote that “*We didn’t...*” (2 Peter 1:16ff) This is not something made up; this is Peter telling us what he saw; this is his eye-witness account of that day on the mountain, a story that he wants to pass on to others so that we can see the same things about Jesus that Peter saw. On the way back down, Jesus told them not to tell others for now; “tell them later” but keep quiet for now because people might misunderstand and that would make life complicated for Jesus.

Mark tells us quite simply: three things happen: first of all, Jesus is changed. “*He was...*” (Mark 9:2-4) This whole picture of dazzling light and glory speaks of only one thing: God. This is what God is like; God is light; God’s glory dazzles anyone who happens to see it. Jesus gave up this glory when He came to the earth; when He was born in Bethlehem, He came as an ordinary child, His glory hidden from the world for a time. Jesus of Nazareth comes to begin His ministry, and can do extraordinary things and people ask “who is this?” He drops hints, but this is the one and only time that anyone sees the light and the glory of His God-ness. He is bigger than the whole world; He is the creator of the universe, the Son of God, the Lord of heaven and earth. This dazzling light and glory shows how big Jesus is; He is more than just a man, but somehow, standing in front of these three disciples, is God in human flesh and blood.

Secondly, two of the great figures from Israel’s history appear – Moses and Elijah. Moses is the great law-giver in Israel; God gave the Ten Commandments through Moses; he stands for

a way of life that God gave to His people in the Old Testament. Elijah is the great prophet of the Old Testament; God spoke to the people through Elijah, calling them back to loyalty when they had wandered away; “this is what God says” is the great cry of the prophets and Elijah is arguably the greatest of these. These two men stand for all that God has done before Jesus came, this whole piece of work that we call the Old Testament; here they are talking with Jesus; we don’t know what they say, but it might well be something like “we’re with you; we’re right behind you; what God started through us, He is completing in You!”

Thirdly, God speaks. If Peter, James, and John knew their bible, they knew that the cloud would only mean one thing – God! Indeed. “*Then a...*” (*Mark 9:7f*) If they were in any doubt at all about what they were seeing, it was all gone with this. We hear this superb affirmation – “my Son; I love Him; listen to Him!” Jesus has heard these words before, at His baptism, the start of His ministry, but there have been hard times since then, challenges, criticisms, difficult days, accusations; what great psychology from God to let Jesus hear these words again to affirm Him and this time disciples hear as well, so that they are left in no doubt. Who is Jesus? He is God’s Son and God loves Him!

This is the glory and bigness of Jesus so that He is bigger than the whole world. This story takes us outside any idea of Jesus as just ordinary man; He is fully a man, but He is also fully the Son of God. “In our world too a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world.” Peter, James and John got that; they were frightened to see Jesus like this, as it should; they were in the presence of something much bigger than they had ever seen before. Fear drove Peter’s mouth: “*Let us...*” (*Mark 9:5*) But they got it; they understood what they saw; later Peter told us that they were “*eyewitnesses of His majesty*” – “this is what we saw and Jesus is great!”

We live in a culture that would diminish Jesus and Christian faith. It is done in lots of ways, some of them very subtle: the culture tries to diminish by ignoring Him and pretending that He doesn’t exist and pushing Jesus and the Church to the margins of society. It is done by attacking Him and the basis of our faith, making claims that all these stories are a made-up fiction and that no sensible, intelligent person would ever believe these stories. The culture tries to diminish Jesus by laughing at Him and at the Church so that we are objects of fun at the margins of people’s thinking. The more this happens, the more people in general think that what they hear from the culture is true and the harder we have to work to persuade people to believe. This story shows us Jesus of the gospels and He will not be diminished; He is bigger than the whole world and is worthy of our trust; listen to Him!

It is so easy to be sidetracked. Anyone involved in the life of the church can find ourselves side-tracked into other things that take up our time and energy. We can spend our time keeping the life of the church going, making up rotas and working these rotas; we have to make sure that all the groups and organisations keep going and that everyone is happy. The danger in this is that the church becomes the be-all-and-end-all of our time and energy; we spend so much time and energy keeping the church on the go that we forget to nurture our faith in Jesus. Where is the time to read the Bible or to pray, the ways by which we can deepen and strengthen our faith in Jesus? Where is the time to talk to our families and friends, to encourage each other in faith? Where is the time to remember that the Church is not the Saviour; we don’t put our trust in the Church, but we put our trust in Jesus. Don’t be side-tracked but let us keep our eyes on Jesus. This story reminds us that Jesus is the centre.

We stop asking big questions. Where do we find the space to ask big questions? Life is busy and so there is often no space to stop and think, to stop and stare at the world. Life is busy and often there is no space to consider life and what life is all about. When we do take time, we often don’t consider that the Church has answers to these big questions: someone suggested that people now go to church to be entertained and to the theatre or to the movies to be made to think! Is that where we ask big questions about life? At the theatre or the movies

or watching television? Today's big question is all about Jesus: "who is Jesus?" When we begin to ask that question and begin to search for answers in the Church and in the Bible, we are asking a life-defining question! This story reminds us that there are big questions.

The story of Jesus' transfiguration reminds us of His bigness and glory. "In our world too a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world." Bigger than the whole world? Can we really believe that? Peter, James and John believed that because they saw His glory; they were "*eye-witnesses of His majesty*". They never forgot what they saw and wanted everyone else to understand how big Jesus is. No culture can diminish this Jesus; He will always be full of God and His glory. Being side-tracked we forget, but this story brings us back to focus our eyes on Jesus; He is the centre of the story, He dominates the story, He tells us that He is worthy of our trust. Here is a big question: what is life all about? This story tells us that life is all about trust and faith in Jesus; He is the centre of life, He is the centre of our relationships; He is the centre of everything.

What do you think? What do you see today of Jesus? What can you believe about Him? Does this help you to trust Him? Does this inspire you to follow Him? Does this make you see Jesus in a different light? Is there something here to pass on to your friend?