



JESUS VISION

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It's great to be back with you this morning, and it's great to see our D'Iberville team back as well. Next week, we've devoted the morning to them to hear what God did on this trip. I've already heard a few stories and I can't wait to get the details. Be sure to join us for that.

As for the Peabodies, we had an awesome time in Maui. It was so nice to see some sunshine and warm up. I think it was in the 80s when we left. We were wearing shorts and flip flops and it was still hot. So it was a little shocking to come home to snow and hail when we got off the plane. We weren't quite prepared for that kind of return to reality.

The disciples have a similar shock to the system waiting for them as we continue our study of the book of Mark. Last Sunday, Dave walked you through Jesus asking his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter gave that clear and perfect response, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." It was this moment of recognition, a real high point for the disciples in coming to a conclusion about who Jesus is. And as Dave shared with you, that's a point we all have to come to. What are we going to do with the claims Jesus makes about himself? Who do we say that he is?

The disciples had a big, exciting "aha" moment. They were basking in the warm sunlight of discovering the truth that he's the Lord. But no sooner do they make that discovery than they step off the plane and get a cold dose of reality from Jesus.

Mark 8:31-9:1

He then began to teach them that 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.

Talk about bringing down the mood. Jesus is sounding morbid. Why is he talking about suffering and rejection and death? Peter has just paid him this huge compliment, saying he believes Jesus is God's chosen one to save Israel. The disciples have put all their faith and trust in this man, and now he's talking about it all coming to an end. When you've bet all your money on one horse, you don't want to hear that the horse isn't going to run in the race. And that's how it was starting to sound with Jesus. Quite frankly it bothered Peter, and he wasn't going to let Jesus keep going on about it.

...Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Those are some strong words. The same Peter who had such a brilliant response a couple verses earlier now gets called Satan. Just because we see one truth clearly doesn't make us immune from error. Jesus calls Peter on it and knows he has a wrong idea of what this Christ business is all about.

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

Scott Davis trains soldiers how to jump and rappel. They have a training tower down at Fort Lewis. Scott says he starts off by going up to the top of the tower and running straight off the edge and jumping Australian style, facing away from the tower. All the cadets are impressed until Scott looks at them and says, "Okay, now it's your turn." They are stunned by the thought of doing anything that crazy.

As Jesus tells his disciples about what's ahead, it's like he is throwing himself over the edge, announcing his upcoming death. But he's not just talking about his own suffering, because then he looks at his disciples and says, "Okay, now it's your turn. Pick up your cross and follow me over the edge."

When we finally come to terms with who Christ is, as the disciples did, the next question is whether or not we'll follow him. And following Jesus always means following him to Calvary. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote,

The cross is laid on every Christian...Thus it begins: the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise God-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.

For all the joy that comes from knowing Jesus is the Christ, there is also great personal cost. We are called to die to ourselves, to break the hold our own nature has on us. In his book, *The Calvary Road*, Roy Hession helps define what "self" looks like.

It is always self who gets irritable and envious and critical and worried. It is self who is hard and unyielding in its attitudes toward others. It is self who is shy and self-conscious and reserved. No wonder we need breaking.

There is so much about us that needs to die or be broken. And the struggle isn't just once – it's every day. What was it Dave said last week? The problem with life is that it's so daily. In Luke's version of this conversation, it highlights the fact that Jesus said we have to take up our crosses DAILY. Maybe it's putting your spouse's interests in front of your own. Maybe it's having grace and patience for your coworkers or forgiving a friend before they ask you to. We are called to walk a different path when we follow Jesus.

Sometimes it looks completely different than what we're expecting. Karin was talking this past week with a friend who goes to another church. This friend now has a grown son who recently moved in with his girlfriend and has walked away from the faith he was raised in. The mom has been grieving and agonizing over it. Everything about her wants to set her son straight. But she told Karin this week, "I realized that my family has a long legacy of cutting off anyone who is sinning or making what we feel are bad choices. I feel like God has been telling me that breaking that cycle is my burden to bear right now." Loving someone in the face of their rebellion is one of the most difficult and one of the most Christlike crosses to carry, because that's what he's done for us.

So here we have the encouraging confidence of Peter's declaration last Sunday, "You are the Christ," followed immediately by the hard news that this Christ is going to die and he asks us to be willing to die as well – die to our pride, our own agendas, our self-centeredness.

Jesus lets his disciples sit and process that information for roughly a week. Then one of the most extraordinary events in all of Scripture takes place.

Mark 9:2-13

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. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

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." (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

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.

As I said, it's one of the most unusual events in all the Bible. Nothing else like it shows up in any other religious literature either. It's a little bizarre when you think about it very long. Three disciples see Jesus' clothes look funny. They see Moses and Elijah. They hear God talking in a cloud. Then they come back down and aren't allowed to talk about it. The question is, what's the point? Why would Mark record this for us? How does such a strange incident have anything to do with us?

It all goes back to what we were discussing at the beginning. Jesus explained to his disciples that difficult days were ahead for anyone wanting to be associated with him. Jesus is about to die. The disciples' world will be turned upside down. Then, after he rises from the dead, he's going to leave them on their own. Their world will be shaken again. Then persecution is going to break out against Christians, and once more they will face trouble like they've never seen before.

Hard times are on the horizon. But at the heart of this brief event, there is hope. As odd as the story may seem on the surface, it contains the power to motivate and sustain those disciples as they go on to lead the baby church through the stormy weather ahead.

If that's true, then I want to dig into this story, because I need it. Every day is a challenge to live the Christian life and die to my own agendas. You and I may not face the kinds of persecution those first Christians did, but we still struggle to be faithful and to keep believing and behaving like we believe in the face of a constant string of obstacles.

Let's look at the story again and see how it helps us:

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. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

When it's difficult to be a Christian, one of the things I most need is

The Jesus I can't relate to

That sounds completely backward. I consider a big part of my job as a preacher to be showing the human side of Jesus -- how much he is like us, how he experienced what we do. It's radical to think about God taking on an actual body and what the implications are for that.

But if that's all he is, then Jesus is just a good example for me. He's a buddy who lived a good life for me to pattern myself after. And that's not a full picture of the truth. As much as Jesus was like us, he is also infinitely different from us, because he is God. One of the ways he's different is in his glory.

When his clothes became that dazzling white, it wasn't a new thing for him – that was the REAL him. That was a peek into the glory Jesus has always had in heaven. In the book of Revelation, John tries to describe for us the vision he had of Jesus in his full glory:

Revelation 1:13-16

His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

That speaks of power. It speaks of beauty. It speaks of victory. It's a bigger Jesus than we could ever imagine. Notice it's not even Jesus doing anything – it's Jesus just being himself. If I'm going to endure suffering and pain as a Christian, I need a solid confidence in the person waiting for me on the other side, that he is greater than what I'm about to go through.

Not only Jesus' glory sets him apart – his purity does also. I like how Mark describes the whiteness of Jesus' clothes: “whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.”

We could never have enough bleach to get ourselves as spotless as Christ. As hard as we try, we can't wash away our stains.

But in the book of Revelation, we're told that Jesus gives the saints white robes. That's like saying he makes us pure. We can borrow his clothes. We need him to be different from us in that way.

When Isaac was five, he had to have eye surgery to correct a vision problem. For months ahead of time, we had appointments with the surgeon, and through those meetings, Karin and I came to the conclusion that we didn't much care for his style. He seemed cocky and detached. No bedside manner at all. This was our firstborn and we were agonizing over our decision. We wanted some comfort and sensitivity and this doctor just didn't value the touchy feely side we wanted.

But when the day of the surgery came, in walked this incredibly self-assured, highly skilled doctor who was the master of the operating room, and then Karin and I understood perfectly. Even though we couldn't relate to him, we needed him to be exactly who he was that day. It was the most reassuring feeling to know that the person holding the scalpel was one of the best surgeons in Washington. And this was an easy procedure for him. He was far more capable than this surgery would require.

A big, dazzlingly bright and pure Jesus may seem unrelatable, but he's the only one for the job in our trials. We need a big Jesus to keep us going. This is the Jesus who went so far as to conquer death. This is the Jesus who holds the stars in his hands and speaks with a voice as big as the ocean. This is the Jesus whose light is stronger than the darkness, the Jesus who earns our complete confidence that things will be okay in the end. This is the Jesus who is way more capable than our troubles call for. And it's a Jesus who is

breathhtakingly, hurt-your-eyes and drop to your knees kind of beautiful. That's a God we can worship without reservation.

Jesus is the Christ who is bigger and less like us than we could begin to describe. And that's exactly the kind of Jesus we need – one we can't relate to. We also need

The Jesus I can't categorize

Look at the next section of our story:

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." (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

Don't you love the honesty of this report? Here Peter babbles something that makes no sense, but Mark shares it with us anyway. There's no dressing it up to present Peter in a better light. The facts are just laid out for us as they happened.

I don't know how the disciples knew it was Moses and Elijah. Maybe they could tell from the conversation. Maybe Jesus told them later. In any case, here were the two most prominent men of the Jewish faith having a conversation with Jesus.

Moses and Elijah were larger than life characters. They symbolized something. Moses is credited with the first five books of the Bible, also known as the Law, because they give us a summary of God's commandments for his people. Elijah represented the prophets, God's megaphones to the Israelites. The Law was the written word telling everyone how to live and the Prophets were the spoken word, calling for a response from the heart.

So Peter sees these two men with Jesus, and he begins to equate them. Now there are 3 greats: Moses, Elijah and Jesus. And Peter thinks it would be good to build a shelter for each one. Peter is trying to make sense of how Jesus fits in with the rest of his religious understanding.

God then takes Peter by the collar, so to speak, and shakes him. "This is my SON." This is my son. He's not in the same category as these other two. Listen to what he's saying.

With three kids in the house, I've done a lot of puzzles over the years, from the ones with about two pieces to those with hundreds. I've learned that I really need the lid to put them together. I need to see the picture that I'm trying to make.

When it comes to Jesus, so often we treat him as if he's just another puzzle piece, when he's really the lid. You can see it clearly in cultures where they've just blended Jesus

into the local religion. They worship ancestors and Jesus side by side, or add him to the list of gods they pray to.

In our own experience, we often put Jesus at the same level as other aspects of our faith. I once heard a friend explain that he saw himself as being sort of a partner with Jesus in working out his faith. Take our effort, our religious feelings and mix in a little Jesus along with it.

Jesus isn't a puzzle piece in faith – he's the lid. He's the big picture. He's not one more law – he fulfills the law. He doesn't bring us another message from God – he IS the message. He's not just a part of the solution – he's the whole solution. He is one with God and we can't reduce him to a category of religion or a small portion of what makes us right with God.

It's like the whole song of the Bible has been building in this crescendo toward him. Luke fills us in a little bit about the conversation that took place between Moses, Elijah and Jesus. You know what they talked about? It wasn't about Moses. "Hey remember that time when you got mad and threw down the tablets?" It wasn't about Elijah, "What was it like to ride to heaven in a chariot of fire?" No - it was all centered on Jesus and what he was about to do in Jerusalem. Even Mark makes it clear that Moses and Elijah were talking TO Jesus – They were there for him, not the other way around.

That's why after his resurrection, Jesus could show his disciples how the Law and the Prophets all point to him.

And this brings us to the third thing we need, which is

The Jesus I can't take my eyes off of

Here's my favorite line from this story:

Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

I love the way that's worded. It doesn't say Moses and Elijah went away, although we assume they did. It just says all the disciples saw after that was Jesus. After God had so powerfully voiced his affirmation, nobody cared about anyone else. He was the focus.

Down in the trenches it's hard to see anything but the dirt all around you. The disciples had their focus recentered on Christ. That's what the author of Hebrews encourages us to do as well:

Hebrews 12:2-3

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

We fix our eyes on Jesus so we won't grow weary and lose heart. That's the whole point of this transfiguration event – to help the disciples keep their eyes on Jesus when things get rough.

Last Sunday we went and visited a little church in Lahaina that met in an elementary school cafeteria. It was great to worship with them and we felt right at home. They sang a lot of the same songs we do. They wore their beach clothes to church. Some things were better there, though – they handed out foam pads when you got there so you had something soft to sit on.

The church seemed to have their act together – great signage, good materials. They even gave visitors a pooka shell necklace. Plus they were in Maui! So I was kind of surprised at the small turnout they had. As I spoke with the pastor afterwards, he shared with me that the church had just come through a really difficult time, with lots of hurtful conflict and several families leaving. Even in a paradise like Hawaii, the Christian life isn't an easy one.

But as I listened to he and his wife, it was clear that what had gotten them through it was their focus on Christ. His message that morning was all about Jesus through and through. One of his quotes that stood out that morning was from Warren Wiersbe, who said, “The Christian life is a feast, not a funeral.” And they were choosing to live like that, even through an incredibly difficult season. The only way they could do that was to keep their eyes on Jesus.

What's your vision of Jesus like this morning? I don't know what you're up against. It could be the hard business of life that we all face, or it could be specifically related to your walk with Christ. I don't know what questions you're dealing with today.

I do know that what Christ offers in response isn't necessarily an escape, but a bigger picture of himself.

There's an old story about a boy in the Midwest growing up during the Great Depression. He lived on a farm, and one day caught news that the circus was coming to town. He had never seen a circus before and didn't really know what one was, but it sounded like a lot of fun. So he begged his dad to go see it.

Well, being a farmer, his dad couldn't pull himself away from the harvesting that had to be done. But he agreed to let his son go, and he gave him a silver dollar to take and spend at the circus.

The boy was thrilled and ran off to town. He arrived just as the performers were parading through downtown toward the big top. He saw the tigers and the elephants walk past, along with the band and the acrobats doing flips down the road.

He was mesmerized by it all. Finally, the end of the parade came into sight, and the boy clapped and clapped. Just as the last clown passed in front of him, the boy flipped his

silver dollar to the clown and said, “Thanks for the great show!” Then he turned and ran back home without even knowing he’d never actually been to the circus.

There’s so much more to see of Jesus. We are too easily satisfied with less of him and we miss out on the bigger picture. I need a Jesus who I can’t relate to, who I can’t categorize and who I can’t keep my eyes off of.

We serve a Lord who is greater than anything that comes our way. That’s the vision that stuck with Peter. It was the motivation that kept him going. Years later, he would write,

2 Peter 1:16-19

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; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

You can hear the certainty in Peter’s words. He saw the glory and majesty of Jesus with his own eyes. He heard God’s voice with his own ears. Even when we’re in a dark place, Peter says, the light shines.

There is hope, there is comfort and there is strength to make it in life, because Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He invites us to walk with him through suffering, to take up our cross, knowing what awaits us is real and sure and more permanent than pain. As Paul said,

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There's far more here than meets the eye.

The idea is great, but practically speaking, how do we apply all this? How do we get that bigger view of Jesus? As I reflect on what we’ve looked at this morning, two thoughts stand out. First, the invitation to go up the mountain came from Jesus. It’s his desire to reveal more of himself to those who follow him. Proverbs 8 says “Those who seek me find me.” God is not playing games and trying to hide himself from us. He invites us up the mountain. He wants us to see more.

So the beginning point is to want to want more of Christ. I can ask him to plant that desire in my heart, to give me a hunger that can’t be filled by anything but him. I need to accept that invitation to follow Jesus up the mountain, whatever that mountain might be.

Then comes the part we read in Hebrews that talks about with “fixing” our eyes on Jesus. While we were in Hawaii, I turned into the classic tourist dad – My uniform every day consisted of my hat and sunglasses, my camera in a fanny pack and a video camera slung over my shoulder. All I needed was a pair of black socks. It wasn’t pretty, but it was functional. I was trying to snap as many shots as I could. On our last day there, we went for a boat ride that took us around some reefs. For a long time, I had the video camera trained on the water without seeing much, so I packed it back away. Wouldn’t you know – as soon as it was back in the bag, somebody spotted a whale. It was right in the direction I had been looking, but I missed it. It was disappointing, but at least it makes a perfect illustration. So much pulls our attention away from Jesus, whether it is the trouble we are facing or other good things we pursue or just the busyness of life. There is a conscious discipline involved in fixing our focus on Jesus. It is only as we train our eyes in his direction that we will see more of him in due time. When we’re distracted, our ability to see him is diminished.

In just a few moments, we’ll once again celebrate the Lord’s Supper and we’ll reflect on the suffering Christ experienced for us. As we prepare for that, I’d like you to finish a couple of sentences.

The first one is this: My biggest cross to bear right now is...What hard step of obedience is Christ asking of you right now? What is the dying or breaking that needs to happen? What have you been desiring and not getting? What is causing grief and stress? What do you fear giving up? Any of those questions could help you complete that sentence.

The second sentence to finish is this: My biggest distraction right now is...What is pulling your focus off of Christ? It could be the same as your cross. It could be life in general.

Finally, circle the word for you that best fits where you are at:

I need to see more of Jesus’ – power for my problems
Forgiveness for my sins
Love for me
Peace for my stress
Comfort for my pain
Beauty for my worship

There’s an old hymn that says:

*Fair are the meadows, fairer still the woodlands,
Robed in the blooming garb of spring:
Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer
Who makes the woeful heart to sing.*

Christ wants your woeful heart to sing this morning. What vision of him do you need for that to happen?