

READ Mark 8:34-9:1

We noted in our study last week that these verses and the previous verses concerning Jesus's identity as the Messiah and Christ serve as a climax and pivotal turning point in Mark's Gospel. We now have Jesus openly acknowledging who He is to His Apostles, and He begins clearly informing them of what He must undergo as the Messiah. Remember...Peter was not on board with Jesus's foretold future which prompts a sharp rebuke from Jesus along with furthered teachings concerning the cost of discipleship. If anyone, Apostles included, wanted to follow after Jesus then it was required for them to deny themselves, take up their crosses (a euphemism for dying to self), and follow Jesus wherever He would lead them...even if that meant to His own death.

To Peter and surely the rest of the Apostles this must have been such a confusing time. Here is Jesus recognizing His incredible nature as the Messiah of God, and yet here He is also foretelling not of triumph but of suffering, anguish, and affliction. However, those horrible experiences would not come without great reward for He does also foretell of His coming in glory and in the power of the kingdom of God. Again, this must have left the Apostles' heads spinning, but Jesus is going to continue to bring them along with continued teaching concerning what must soon take place.

These thoughts and considerations bring us to our text of this morning which is **Mark 9:2-13**, the transfiguration of Jesus. This well known text has been dissected in who knows how many ways in order to find the meaning behind this incredible event, but I want us to consider this morning how it surely does fit right into the flow of Mark's development of Jesus as the Messiah and what He must soon suffer as He shifts His focus towards Jerusalem and what must take place there. Let's read the text together and then focus on allowing the text to show us the path to glory Jesus will take, and it might just be a little, maybe a lot, different than what one might logically expect.

Mark 9:2-13

A. A Glorious Ascension (Mark 9:2,3)

1. Time and time throughout these studies, I have noted the numerous allusions and quotations from the writings of Isaiah, but here in this text the emphasis will be on allusions to the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt to the promised land. These allusions are certainly appropriate considering Jesus has come to bring freedom, renewal, and restoration to the people of God, and we are seeing Jesus Himself take a Moses-type position as the leader of this new-exodus. Notice all of the parallels between this text and what took place at Mt. Sinai.
 - a) First, consider those involved in this occurrence. The text tells us that Jesus goes up on the mountain (which mountain we are not sure) with Peter, James, and John. This lines up with what we see having taken place in **Exodus 24** regarding the covenant ceremony that was taking place between God, Moses, and Israel. A select few are chosen to join Moses to be a part of this grand event. Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu are names specifically mentioned and 70 of Israel's elders are also brought up onto Mt Sinai. (**Exodus 24:1,2**)
 - b) Secondly, the timing of this event also parallels with what took place at Sinai. **Exodus 24:16** states, *"The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days. On the seventh day he called to Moses from the cloud."* Here also we have six days having past since the events of the previous context with Jesus taking these three Apostles up onto the mountain on the 7th day.
 - c) Third and lastly for these two verses, consider the dazzling nature of Jesus, and how it compares to the shining face of Moses that can be seen in **Exodus 34:29-35** that came as a result of another instance where he had been in the presence of God communicating with Him. Both of these instances were surely indicators of divine presence either being

close to it, or in Jesus's case actually containing it within Himself.

2. These parallels seem to be shown in order to lead the reader to expect restoration and renewal from Jesus. When the people thought of Moses, they thought of such things along with the covenant which established fellowship between God and His people. Here is Jesus standing in the same role as One who was bringing restoration, renewal, and greater fellowship between God and His people. What a glorious ascension and blessing it must have been for these three men to experience such an event!

B. A Glorious Appearance (Mark 9:4-6)

1. The glorious nature of this event becomes even greater as suddenly Elijah and Moses appear before these men and begin conversing with Jesus. What an unreal experience this must have been for Peter, James, and John, but maybe even more than unreal with the scary nature of it. After all, Mark tells us these men were terrified, but again this isn't the first time and it won't be the last time we see such a thing from these men. Who can blame them, though? They were living during the most amazing days of history in the presence of the Son of God who was doing all sorts of miraculous and unbelievable things. We would probably be scared, too!
2. Nonetheless, Peter feels compelled to speak up and say something as seems to be his normal mode of operation. He states the obvious of it being a good and blessed thing for them to be there, and suggests the appropriate thing to do would be to build three shelters or tabernacles for each of these holy men before them. Of course, we might first wonder how he knew who Elijah and Moses were. I can't imagine they had very reliable pictures of them on Google or anything of that sort, but more importantly we need to see his understanding of God's presence surely being in this place with these men being there as they were. Again, what an incredible opportunity to witness such a meeting involving these three men!

C. A Glorious Announcement (Mark 9:7,8)

1. However, the presence of these two Old Testament heroes of faith was not purely by chance. No, these men were here in this moment by the power of God for the benefit of these three disciples. Let's think for a moment concerning these prophecies involving these two great prophets and the restoration of all things. **Deuteronomy 18:15-19** & **Malachi 4:4-6** both speak of the coming of a Moses & Elijah type figure who would bring about a great renewal.
2. The text in **Deuteronomy 18:15-19** gives stern warnings that the Moses like prophet better be heeded, and those who failed to do so would be held accountable. **Malachi 4:4-6** mentions both Moses and Elijah. The instructions, statutes, and ordinance of Moses needed to be followed, and Elijah needed to be heard because he would seek to *"turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers."* Such language was certainly of great importance, and it is no wonder that Peter would feel the need to build dwelling places for God's presence considering His greatest of prophets were most certainly here and ready to renew and restore.
3. However, there then comes this great announcement from a great cloud that suddenly appeared over them which surely is another parallel with the great events of Sinai. From this cloud comes a voice who declares, *"This is my beloved Son; listen to Him!"* While Peter and the other two Apostles are caught up with this incredible sight, they are quickly reminded that it is not literal Moses and Elijah who have come back for good, but it is the fulfilled representation of them in the Messiah that is now in their presence. He was the true chosen and anointed one of God, not a simple foreshadow as were Moses and Elijah. They were told to open their ears and listen to the one who they truly needed to listen to. Once again we have this theme of spiritual deafness showing itself to be a problem even among Jesus's own Apostles.

4. Nevertheless with this in mind, the divine declaration of God leaves us with some important understandings. He was the one who would speak and prophesy, and those who heard Him needed to listen and heed or else they would be held accountable (**Deuteronomy 18:15-22**). Further, it was Jesus who had come to restore and renew all things between God and His people. He would not do so through a building that would serve as the meeting place between God and men, but it would be within His own body that God dwelt in perfect unity with mankind. He was the Shelter and the Tabernacle. Jesus is clearly shown to be the glorious Messiah who would bring renewal and restoration to mankind. What an incredible declaration for these three Apostles to hear straight from the mouth of God from the cloud!

D. A Glorious Affliction (Mark 9:9-13)

1. Yet, the episode isn't quite over for they still have a descent to make back down to where the rest of the Apostles are located, and it is on this descent that Jesus tells these men they are not allowed to tell anyone about what they have seen until after the Son of Man (they recognize this to be Him at this point) has risen from the dead. Let's remember this is not the first time they have heard Him say this (**8:31**), but that doesn't stop them from again being confused and wondering what it meant for Him to rise from the dead. Maybe in their minds they are wrestling with whether He is being literal or figurative. After all, they did just see Him transfigured in the presence of two of the greatest men of God who have ever lived, and He was even pronounced as being so much greater than they!
2. This leads to the final question they ask in during this glorious experience, *"Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"* You see, the Apostles are struggling to understand how Jesus can be the Messiah, Christ, and Son of Man who is to return God's glory to among His people while also hearing for a second time that He is going to die. These two things simply can't coincide in their minds, so they have to ask whether or not Elijah coming first is actually legitimate.
3. The reality is that it was not the scribes who decided such a thing would take place, but it was God as we have already mentioned from **Malachi 4:4-6**. Jesus affirms this as being true as He states, *"Elijah does come first and restores all things...Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah has come (John The Baptist...NA), and they did whatever they pleased to him (killed by Herod...NA), just as it is written about him."* (**Mark 9:12,13**) Jesus affirms the reality that those who come in the likeness of these great heroes of faith from days long past who suffered for God will themselves suffer for God as they are busy going about doing His will within their lives.
4. Moses was a man who suffered at the hands of God's own people as they complained and grumbled against him even wanting him removed from leadership. Elijah was a great prophet of God whose life was put in peril through the evil workings of wicked people such as Ahab and Jezebel who wanted his life because he spoke up for the causes of God. John the Baptist is also someone who we need to consider in this text since he himself is a fulfillment figure of Elijah as the one who came to prepare the people to be ready for the coming Messiah. He himself was persecuted and killed for speaking up for the truths of God.
5. Here is Jesus's point...if these three men suffered as they sought to please the Lord then why wouldn't the Son of Man be willing to do the same thing? If serving God means suffering in some sense then even the Messiah as He served God would more than likely have to do the same. In fact, is this not what Jesus sought to teach them in the previous context through His teachings of humiliation, sacrifice, and submission? I find it not coincidental at all that these recordings of the transfiguration always come following Jesus's teachings on what it means to

be a true disciple. He is showing that even the one who is their leader is willing to suffer if it means fulfilling God's desire and will. Whereas men believe glory can only be achieved through great, powerful, and forceful triumph...Jesus is shown that glory from God actually comes through means of suffering in humiliation, sacrifice, and submission. The transfiguration is cool, yes, but it is more about how Jesus is going to get to this place of true and ultimate glory, and He is going to continually show His disciples that it will only come through the means of the cross and His resurrection.

Application Questions

A. Do I see Jesus's love on full display in His willingness to suffer?

1. As we're going through these texts where Jesus is openly and plainly speaking of His own impending death, it might cause someone to think to themselves...if Jesus knew this was what awaited Him...why did He continue to go through with it? Why not escape it?
2. This is an extremely honest question that seems quite logical to our minds where we are thinking that self-preservation is what leads to ultimate success, but here is the rub between the way we think and the way Jesus was going about this whole entire process as the Messiah. He was doing everything out of His love for His Father and for us. His entire motivation throughout it all was love for others. Why else would anyone ever make such great sacrifices if not for others? If we have not considered Jesus's motivation for everything He is doing up to this point...now would be a great time to recognize His love being on full display.

B. Am I willing, like Jesus, to suffer according to God's will?

1. Like Jesus, am I willing to take a path to glory that goes against conventional wisdom? We would think glory would only come through triumph and victory over others, but Jesus is clearly showing up that true glory before God will come when we are willing to suffer for His sake and according to His will. Jesus did this by sacrificing Himself for us, and we can and must do so in various ways as well.
2. We can and must suffer for God by first practicing what we mentioned earlier concerning the need to die to self in complete humility, sacrifice, and submission. Our suffering might manifest itself in ridicule from others for our faith. It could also be a self-denial of desires we have for the direction of our lives. It could even be the actual loss of life for our faith as is seen in the case of the Apostles and many of the earliest disciples. The reality is not whether we will suffer, but in what ways and to what degree. If Jesus was willing to do so for God and us...are we determined to return that willingness with the same? If not...then only shame awaits us from the perspective of the one we claim to love.

Main Point/Conclusion: *True glory comes through suffering for the causes of Christ.*

So much of what Jesus is doing in the Gospel accounts is counterintuitive to what normal human reasoning would say to do. We would say that glory can only come through powerful and forceful triumph. Surely this is what the Apostles were thinking since Peter rebukes Jesus for His statements about His impending death, and they continue to struggle to understand how He can be transfigured as He was, announced as the one who should be listed to even over Moses and Elijah, and yet He turns right around and says He is indeed going to be raised which must mean He also has to die. How could this be true? How could glory come through such a process? In the minds of men such isn't possible, but God is more than willing to allow the wisdom of men to not comprehend the way He works. The question is...will we humbly acknowledge His ways as being grander than our own? Will we be willing to pursue glory through suffering and sacrifice? May He strengthen us to do so and follow in the footsteps of our Savior Jesus the Messiah of God.