

The Journey to the Cross, Part 1

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[0 : 00] A little bit later, we're going to read from Mark, the Gospel of Mark. We're going to be back in Mark's Gospel, seeing Jesus on the road to the cross.

Mark chapter 9, we'll begin there. But bear this passage in mind as we read in Mark 9. There's deliberate parallels that Mark draws our attention to as Moses and others go up the mountain of the Lord to meet with the God of glory.

So let's read Exodus chapter 24 at page 82 together. Then God said to Moses, Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and 70 of the elders of Israel.

You are to worship at a distance, but Moses alone is to approach the Lord. The others must not come near, and the people may not come up with him. When Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words and laws, they responded with one voice, Everything the Lord has said we will do.

Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

[1 : 16] Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar.

Then he took the book of the covenant and read it to the people. They responded, We will do everything the Lord has said. We will obey. Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.

Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself.

But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites. They saw God, and they ate and drank. The Lord said to Moses, Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commands I have written for their instruction.

Then Moses set out with Joshua, his assistant, and Moses went up on the mountain of God. He said to the elders, Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them.

[2 : 34] When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the Lord covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud.

To the Israelites, the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain, and he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

Amen. This is God's word. In the Gospel of Mark and chapter 9, which you'll find on page 1012. We're back in the Gospel of Mark.

We will be, for the next few months, as I said, reflecting on Jesus' journey to the cross. And here, in this section, we'll be reminded that the King of glory is the suffering servant.

So let's read the first 13 verses of Mark chapter 9. 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.

[3 : 50] 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. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what rising from the dead meant.

[4 : 58] And they asked him, why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first? Jesus replied, to be sure, Elijah does come first and restores all things.

Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him.

Amen. Let's think for a moment about the importance of signs. A good number of years ago, when we lived up north in Dingwall, a family was heading away overseas for work.

And so it was decided that we would all get together and have a picnic on the top of a small hill just outside Dingwall called Fyrish. Think Arthur's Sea, except probably even easier, and you'll kind of have the picture.

Okay, so short walk up the hill, less than an hour to get up. We all had a really nice picnic. And then as we're coming back down, we come to a fork in the road, and some bright spark decided, hey, let's go down a different way.

[6 : 13] So we took a turn in our route. Now, the person who suggested it, very important man. So I thought, I'll follow this guy. He's bound to know what he's doing. And three, four hours later, finding ourselves in the woods, beginning to wonder, are we ever going to find civilization?

Should I just abandon this guy who I'm now beginning to figure, he doesn't know as much as he thinks he does. Should I try and find my own way? Well, anyway, after about four hours, we saw the car park sign.

And you'll understand that sense of relief, that sense of joy that we were going to get home before nightfall. Now, back in Mark's gospel, which is where we are, we're told in chapter 1, verse 1, very opening words, this is the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

And in the first eight chapters where we were last year, we saw lots of miracles, miracles showing the authority of Jesus, the Son of God.

And so the disciples gladly follow Jesus Christ, the Son of God, when he's doing all these wonderful things. But then the last passage we looked at in chapter 8, read with me chapter 8, verse 31.

[7 : 29] Here is the turn in the road for Jesus and the disciples. This is where things begin to get difficult. Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

So the disciples are being introduced to the fact that Jesus' route to glory is going to involve suffering and death. And instantly there's confusion.

In verse 32, Peter takes Jesus aside in order to rebuke him. This is not the pattern for the way things should go for the King of glory.

And then Jesus says to his disciples, verse 34, this isn't just suffering for Jesus. If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

So now they're understanding the road to glory for any disciple of Jesus is also going to be difficult. But here's the wonderful thing about Jesus.

[8 : 35] He gives them a sign. Chapter 9, verse 1. Here's a sign that they're going to receive to give them hope, to keep them on their journey, to give them their understanding that despite their confusion, this is the leader to follow.

They're going to see Jesus the King come with the power of God. They're going to see the curtain pulled back. The one who has introduced himself to them as the suffering servant, they're going to understand that he is at one and the same time the King of glory.

And so that's what we're going to think about today, that Jesus is both King of glory, suffering servant. And let's think about what that means for our lives. So let's think about signs.

A sign, first of all, of Jesus' glory. In verse 1, the sign is that they will see the kingdom of God come with power. Again, we sort of reverse back early on in Jesus' public ministry as he begins preaching.

And we're told by Mark what his message is. The message that Jesus delivers is the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news. The kingdom of God is near because Jesus, God's King, has come.

[9 : 59] So people are invited to turn away from sin and turn back to God to follow Jesus, to be part of God's kingdom. And we saw so many miracles that are, again, signs of Jesus being God's King with power.

When he calms a storm or when he heals a paralyzed man or when he raises the dead, he is demonstrating, he is giving a sign of his future kingdom.

Miracles, in one sense, are giving us a picture into what life will be like when Jesus comes to make everything new. And this transfiguration, when Jesus' appearance is changed, this is a further example, a further demonstration of the power and the glory of Jesus.

When they see him shine with the glory of heaven, they begin to understand, and they'll understand more later, that Jesus' suffering and Jesus' death do not lessen his glory.

In fact, Jesus can pray that the cross would bring glory to him and to his Father. So what Jesus has been talking about in terms of suffering, rejection, and death become a means for us to see the glory of Jesus.

[11 : 18] But when we think about the transfiguration, when Jesus' appearance is changed, it's a sign that Jesus is God's King, come with power. Let's also think about where this happens.

This is quite deliberate. There's a mountaintop meeting with the Lord. So we remember that we read from Exodus 24. And we'll see there are lots of parallels between Exodus 24 and Mark chapter 9.

So verse 2, for example, it says this took place after six days. Moses and the others are before God for six days, and then he is invited to come and he hears God speak.

Moses had three other witnesses named with him, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu. There was also another 70. Jesus brings Peter and James and John.

There is the dazzling light of glory in Exodus. It's described as being like a fiery furnace, the glory of God. And here, Jesus, verse 3, his clothes became dazzling light.

[12 : 27] There is the cloud of glory, the sign of God's presence comes on both mountains. Both meet with God.

Both hear the voice of God. So here is Mark, and here is Jesus, more particularly drawing on what happened in the Old Testament when Moses went to meet with God.

And here's another mountaintop meeting with God. But there's a difference here. And it's a very significant difference. So when Moses went up the mountain, he talked with God.

We're also introduced in verse 4 to Elijah. Elijah also in the Old Testament went up a mountain and he met with God. He heard God's voice. But notice in verse 4 that they are talking with Jesus.

Up the mountain to meet with God, they are meeting and talking with Jesus. Jesus is God. And then we see it too in the voice from heaven of verse 7.

[13 : 33] What do we hear? This is my son whom I love. Listen to him. Here is God the Father saying to these disciples, you've come up the mountain to meet with the Lord and that Lord, he's Jesus.

So you listen to him. You can trust his word when he says he must suffer and be rejected and die. The Father wants the disciples to see the Father's glory and for that to change them.

Again, a number of years ago, I spent a summer teaching in a Bible college in South Africa. Met lots of interesting people. One of my pupils, students, it turned out after a little while, he told me he was a tribal chief in his local village.

Now, if you hear, wow, tribal chief, that seems pretty cool, doesn't it? It's very different to the usual people that you meet. But see the difference when I saw a picture of him all dressed up in his tribal gear and to see the honor that people gave to him.

All of a sudden, then the glory of his position. All of a sudden, it hits me in a new way. What has Jesus done for his disciples? He's given them a new vision of his glory to sustain their faith and their worship.

[14 : 54] They're given a picture of the unique glory of Jesus. I wonder as we sit here today, has the glory of Jesus hit us? Have we explored the Bible?

Have we read about Jesus? And have we seen him to be the Son of God and the Savior of the world? And one of the things that becomes so clear as we read the Bible is if what the Bible says about Jesus is true, then he's not someone we can just sort of have a casual encounter with.

He's not someone that we can just pass by as being of little consequence, just a figure of history. We're being presented with Jesus as the Son of God, as God's glorious King.

And if that's true, it deserves our attention. And more than that, if this is true, it deserves our worship. And not just half-hearted worship when we can be bothered, but all the devotion of our heart.

So we get this wonderful vision of Jesus' glory. But it's also, it's a signpost of his future glory. So Jesus went back to looking just as he had before.

[16 : 09] But there is a day coming when we will all see Jesus shining with the glory of heaven. The Bible says that just as Jesus came once, he'll also come back again.

He'll come back to restore all things, but he'll also come back as the judge of all people. And so one of the things that we have to deal with is the fact that one day we will all stand before Jesus, our judge.

We'll have to give an account of how we have responded to him. Have we turned from sin and have we trusted in Jesus, our Savior? In the book of Philippians, we're told that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.

But you know, some people, they won't do that willingly. They'll be forced to acknowledge that Jesus, I wanted nothing to do with when I was alive. And now I see that he's the King.

Let me urge you to consider and to respond to the King of glory that we are presented with here so that we are ready to bow before King Jesus gladly when he comes and we stand before him.

[17 : 19] But this isn't just a sign of Jesus' glory. This is also a sign of Jesus' mission. This section, those first 13 verses, go along with those passages we've been referring to in chapter 8.

It fits together with Peter's confession. Jesus asks, who do you say I am? You are the Christ, Son of the living God. It goes together with Jesus' prediction of his suffering and death also.

Because the pattern of Jesus' ministries, he makes clear, is there is humility before he's raised up in glory. There is the cross that must come before the crowd.

The disciples, many of the people in Jesus' day were slow to see that. But it's in line with what they've been prepared for in the Old Testament.

Think about the great prophet Isaiah. Isaiah, you know, at Christmastime we read all these wonderful passages about Jesus, the promised coming King.

[18 : 25] So in chapter 9 we read of Jesus and the government will be on his shoulders. He's the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, the one who will reign forever. But that same Isaiah, speaking about the same person in Isaiah chapter 53, describes him as the suffering servant.

Pierced for our transgressions. Crushed for our sins. The one who is led like a lamb to the slaughter. And we need both of these pictures to make sense of the mission of Jesus.

But for Peter, he's struggling to hear that. For many people in Jesus' day, they really struggled with that. We probably know what selective hearing is.

If we have children, we definitely know what selective hearing is. You know that ability? We have it as well. Children have it in particular, I think. They can tune out what's inconvenient.

And what's difficult. What might make them do something they don't want to do. Well, many in Jesus' day, what had they tuned out? They tuned out the idea that God's king would suffer.

[19 : 37] That God's king would have to die. They wanted a king who was all about glory. We want the king who's going to get rid of our enemies and give us peace and give us a great nation again.

And it explains in part why Peter is confused when Jesus speaks about suffering and rejection. Because that's not part of the message that he was used to hearing.

But we need to understand that for Jesus' mission, there is suffering before there is glory. Connects us, in a sense, to the question of Elijah that comes up in verse 11.

They ask Jesus, why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first? So almost the last word of the Old Testament, Malachi chapter 4, verse 5, there is this promise from God.

I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord come. So the day of the Lord, the day of restoration, day of salvation, day of judgment for God's enemies.

[20 : 42] But before that, there was this promise that Elijah would come. And so the logic seems to be that the disciples are thinking, well, hang on a minute. We've seen Jesus as the king of glory.

So surely this is the end of the story. Why would we need Elijah to come? Because here we are on a mountain meeting with the Lord and Jesus is shining with glory. And Jesus says to them in verse 12, Elijah does come first and restores all things.

Why then is it written that the son of man must suffer much and be rejected? And he points to the pattern of the second Elijah, who is John the Baptist. He's come and they've done to him everything they wish.

In Mark's gospel, it's understood that the Elijah to come is John the Baptist. And John the Baptist, his ministry was to begin restoring people back to God. He turned people away from sin and towards God, prepared people for the coming of Jesus.

But what happened to John? He was killed by King Herod. And Jesus says, if that's what happened to the Elijah to come, that's what's going to happen to the Savior.

[21 : 48] That's what's going to happen to me. Jesus too will suffer and die. Do you know what desire lines are? I discovered this helpful expression recently.

Desire lines are paths that are worn into the ground when people want to take a natural shortcut. So, you know, when you've got a path that meanders, a road that meanders all the way around here, you'll often find a dirt track where lots of people have taken that shortcut.

What was the desire line of the disciples? They wanted Jesus to take his crown without having to go to the cross. They want glory without suffering.

And Jesus is saying to them, that's a shortcut that can be taken. And we also discover in Jesus' mission, again connected to Moses and Elijah, that Jesus is God's final bridge between people and God.

Moses and Elijah meet with Jesus partly because they were those who had met with God on the mountain, but partly because one of their functions in the Old Testament was to be mediators between God and his people.

[22 : 59] They were the middlemen speaking on God's behalf and speaking for the people. And that's what Jesus came to be. Jesus comes from heaven with the glory of God.

So he perfectly represents God, but he also comes to be truly human, to be the suffering servant, to be our substitute. And so he is the mediator between us and God.

He is the only way back to God. And so Jesus is going to be explaining, he's begun and he's going to continue to explain that his going to the cross is the way for him to be that mediator, the way for him to be that bridge back to God.

So just as Moses led the people out of slavery into freedom to become God's people, so Jesus leads a new exodus. But he will do that by being the lamb who is sacrificed.

Who dies in our place for our sins so that we might be free to know God. Elijah, his job was to bring an unfaithful people back into relationship with God.

[24 : 11] And Jesus will do that for us by taking all our sins on himself at the cross and then gifting to us his perfect record of right living.

So the only way for us to be right with God is to know Jesus, to have faith in him, to be trusting in him. But you know, he's also reminding us, Jesus is also reminding us that his life is the pattern of the Christian life.

So for us too, we will often have that experience. It's suffering now, but glory to follow. For those of you who were here on last Sunday evening, we heard from Willie's brother Andy, who's a minister in Nantes in France.

And he spoke about a lady who was told, if you read the Bible at home or if you try and talk to me about Jesus, I'll divorce you. There is opposition and there is rejection to be faced as Christians.

There is the call for us to sacrifice our comfort, to sacrifice time and energy for others. There's cost in being a follower of Jesus, but we do it gladly when we know that there's eternal glory to follow.

[25 : 23] When we know we're following Jesus, the King of glory. So it's a sign of Jesus' mission, but it also informs our mission. What are we here for as a church?

We're here to help others to see and enjoy the glory of King Jesus for themselves. It's the one thing that everybody needs. And we need to be willing to lose our lives for Jesus and the gospel, as he says in chapter 8 and verse 35.

One last thing to say about this sign. And it's this. It's a sign to aid our worship. Peter's response.

I love Peter's response in verse 5 when he sees Jesus shining in glory. He sees Elijah and Moses come to talk. Peter said to Jesus, Rabbi, it's good for us to be here. Let's put up three shelters, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.

So he doesn't know what's happening. There's fear. But there's also that understanding. If I'm in the presence of Jesus and I realize that he's my king, and if I'm seeing him in his glory, then surely it's a good thing for me to want that and to enjoy that.

[26 : 35] And so he says, please let this last. It's good for us to be here. It's like any great thing that we enjoy. Now we have a holiday. We enjoy a nice meal. We enjoy a nice occasion.

And we want that moment to last. Of course, because we're finite and we know that it never does. But for Peter, this is a wonderful, wonderful desire to know Jesus in his glory.

But for Peter, it couldn't last either. Because Peter has been taught that Jesus must go down the mountain to ascend another mountain. And he must go up, having been rejected, to carry his cross and to die.

Unbroken joy and glory for Peter cannot come without Jesus going to the cross. Now once he's done that, and once Peter goes to be with Jesus, then there is glory and joy forever in the presence of Jesus.

But there must be the cross first. Verse 9, which again is interesting. You know, when you've seen something amazing, surprising to be told, to stay quiet about it.

[27 : 45] As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they'd seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So there's a time of quiet while they need to process, while they need to see the whole story out to understand what's going on.

But once Jesus has risen, then everything's different. Then they know and they're invited to share this life-changing news that the one that they have seen as the King of Glory has also suffered as their Savior.

But he's now risen again with power. So for now, we find Peter confused and his faith is weak.

He can't see how this path should be. But this transfiguration, this event is a gift to him from Jesus to bring strength for what lies ahead, to help him to keep on following the King of Glory who's also the suffering servant.

We need those signs to strengthen our faith to keep going. That's why we gather for worship Sunday by Sunday. We need a fresh sight of the glory of Jesus.

[29 : 00] So we sing and we pray and we read the Bible and we seek to explain it so that we might keep following after Jesus. Next week, we'll share the Lord's Supper together.

Again, a meal intended to strengthen our faith in a physical way to remind us of the self-giving love of the Lord Jesus, which is intended to strengthen our faith.

And just as it's a sign to aid our worship, it's also a sign to aid our mission. Because just like Peter and the disciples, our mission is to make public what had then been seeking.

That the King who dies on the cross in humiliation is the King of Glory who is now ascended into the glory of heaven.

And he is our way to know and to enjoy God. How do we need to respond to Jesus, the King of Glory and the suffering servant?

[30 : 11] How do we need to hear and respond to this sign?