

Mark 9:2–13

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Date: 09 August 2026

Preacher: David Helm

[0:00] Mark chapter 9, verses 2 through 13. Hear God's word. And after six days, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus.

And Peter said to Jesus, Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud. This is my beloved son. Listen to him. And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them, but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean.

[1:16] And they asked him, why did the scribes say that first Elijah must come? And he said to them, Elijah does come to restore all things.

And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things, and be treated with contempt? But I tell you, that Elijah has come. And they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Good morning. Welcome.

What a wonderful time we're having in Mark's gospel this year.

A firsthand look at Jesus and what he will mean for our church family. Just a few years ago, Lisa and I were in New York.

We have a son who lives in Manhattan. And he's a creative art director. And so the three of us put on our creative lenses and together went to the Van Gogh immersive experience.

[2:26] We entered in through a door, having purchased our tickets. And suddenly, unlike simply viewing a painting on a wall, we were enveloped into a world.

A world where starry night was careening across high walls. And sunflowers were above and a grassy floor beneath.

We were literally immersed in the dynamic palette of Van Gogh's work itself.

Things danced across our person and cascaded across the floor in such a ways that we were, in a sense, overwhelmed.

Couldn't take it all in. In fact, it made an impression. I loved it. I wanted more of it.

[3:33] It's interesting because people today prefer an immersive experience to something rather flat or two-dimensional.

We're all like this now. I was watching an ad on the television the other day. And they were attempting to lure me into the purchase of a Lexus with the word experience.

Experience the Lexus. You don't drive the Lexus. You experience it. You go to coffee shops now or really almost any product.

But they're selling you the experience of something. In fact, there are churches now that you don't attend the worship service. The service in which we give our worship to God.

No, you attend the worship experience. How was your experience? You see, we are an immersively minded people. Nothing necessarily wrong with it.

[4:41] How do you experience God? How do you walk through a day and feel as if you've been enveloped by his presence?

Where the cascading colors of his glory are sweeping by. And the light of his countenance is falling from above.

And the warmth of his comfort is as the sand under your feet in the summer sun. The text today provides, I think, Scripture's most immersive experience one could ever encounter. In fact, we're going to go with these three disciples along with Jesus onto the high mountain. And we're going to see what they saw. And we're going to listen to what they heard. And then we're going to learn what it might mean for us to experience in a very tactile way the glories of our God. [6:03] Interestingly, and spoiler alert, experiencing God, according to this immersive text, requires listening to Jesus.

And that comes by reading God's word. Now, it might not be abundantly obvious how the last phrase of the argument emerges from the text. But nevertheless, stay with me and hang on. Experiencing God will require listening to Jesus, which comes by reading his word.

Well, what did they see? What golden ticket had they purchased? What door did they get behind? It's right there in verses 2 to 6.

This is what they saw. And in one sense, it's the answer to chapter 9 and verse 1, when Jesus indicated it won't be long before some of you who are standing here with me actually see the kingdom of God and all of its power.

[7:19] If you want to know how long does it take for that to occur, well, you're already there. So we walk with Peter and James and John and we enter into this immersive experience, which evidently in verse 2 takes place on a high mountain.

It looks like it's a private event. They're there by themselves. It's not open to public on this day. And this is what they saw.

He, that is Jesus, was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them.

And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, Rabbi, it's good that we're here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah, for he did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

This is what they saw. Jesus, first of all, in unfiltered glory.

[8:36] Unfiltered glory. That couple of verses in 3 and 4, with language about clothes being radiant, intensely white, such as no one on earth could bleach them, reminds me of the summer when we made monarch butterflies on our screened-in porch.

We purchased, I don't know if they go with sewing or what, these little wraparound pieces of wood that have a clasp on them, and we purchased netting wherein you could actually hang the netting on these circular objects, and inside we placed milkweed, and over time a lot of milkweed, to the point where I was driving around Chicago trying to find milkweed, and we had these little, I'm sure there's a technical name for them, but for us they were simply caterpillars, and the caterpillars ate the milkweed until the day arrived when they left the milkweed for the stem itself and changed, as it were, not instantly, but over time, and fashioned themselves, almost weaving themselves inside a green chrysalis, with, interestingly to me, and beautiful in all of its glory, a single golden strand that went on the outside, and there they hung for some time until the morning came, and I went to the screened-in porch and looked in the netting with the milkweed and the stems and the chrysalises, and now one had been open, and there, atop the milkweed, was a monarch butterfly having emerged overnight in all of its resplendent color, beauty, the creation of God floating around until we released it into the world.

They call that kind of thing a metamorphosis, a complete change. that's what they saw when they looked at Jesus.

They see Jesus standing atop a mountain, not a milkweed stem, and he's standing now in some kind of unfiltered glory that is a earthly representation of all the power of the kingdom and presence of God.

from human clay-like flesh instantaneously, in this case, their immersive experiences placed them in the presence of heaven's brilliant fixed facade on the face of a man they knew to be simply Jesus, the Christ, from here and for here.

[12:07] They are now looking, if you can see it, from the dusk of an earthly night to suddenly experiencing on the ceiling of the mountain the northern lights.

His body framed in translucent glow as though the golden shafts of every shooting star that ever went across the horizon now are circling and cresting his brow.

They see Jesus in the power of the kingdom. They've been transported as it were without moving into a glimpse of the glories of heaven.

one 20th century writer said that we're all headed toward that kingdom and if you were to see today the way some men and women will look when they arrive in the glorious splendor of that kingdom you would actually want to worship them or you would find them to be so hideous as they depart from that kingdom as to never want to be one of them.

In other words that the created order of humanity you and I share in some sets this imago dei this image that one day will stand in his presence and either be glorified in regalia and raiment similar to but not equal to that of Jesus but nevertheless some departing for never having understood never having gotten hold of what it would take for them to experience God.

[13 : 56] How do you experience God? How do we experience God? How do we enter into an immersive place in which we're known and we know him and the intimacy and the beauty and the vibrant palette of life is opened up to us.

They see this. Can you see it? But they see more than this. It says that they were looking and there appeared to them Elijah with Moses and they were talking with Jesus.

Now this is interesting. They not only see Jesus in unfiltered glory, they see Moses and Elijah in unsurpassed glory. glory. What an immersive experience.

Dancing across the grassy floor of the mountaintop come Moses and Elijah to stand with Jesus like sentinels dressed in colorful attire, their garments now reflecting and refracting the very light of his glory.

glory. What a wondrous moment in human history. This must have been. The glory of the kingdom which is emanating from Jesus and his presence in inexpressible light is being shared with these two, Moses and Elijah.

[15 : 41] All of this the disciples did see. These two traditionally conceived as the embodiment of the law and the prophets.

These two wonder working men of old. These two by whom God spoke at a different time and through whom God saved in his own way.

These two messengers who lived long ago and interestingly with mysterious parallels to one another in their life and in their death.

Moses you know had spoken with God in the cloud on the mountain. Moses had parted the waters of a Red Sea and led people out of Egypt but not into the promised land did he?

He led them out of Egypt into the kingdom of the wilderness years and Elijah himself following in the same train for while Moses parted the Red Sea and led them forth from slavery into the middle world before salvation with God as their guide Elijah parted the Jordan River itself on the day of his death exiting the promised land having been a temporary proponent of it and throwing his cloak down and the Jordan opens and he walks to the other side and just as Moses dies on Moab's mountain and is buried mysteriously as though he disappeared into the very presence of God so too Elijah is taken from this earth in a chariot of fire the mystery of their final days these two now standing with

[17 : 52] Jesus now let me say something that's coming later in the text because Jesus is going to indicate that Elijah who has already come so the ministry of the law and the ministry of the prophets in the mind of Jesus is somehow starting and finishing with Moses and the Baptist John the Baptist and so what's happening in this experience is Jesus is glorified in the fullness of God's delivering word of Moses the works of Elijah the ministry of the Baptist are all now seemingly in dialogue and conversation with one another and they're here notice in the promised land you know if somebody ever asked you did Moses ever get to the promised land I heard he he sinned and he couldn't get into the promised land if you say yeah he didn't get into the promised land well you haven't read this verse he got in just a long time later here he is

Moses and Elijah no longer left on the outside looking in but they're on the inside conversing with Jesus according to one gospel writer about the implications of his own exodus his own parting his own death his own moment where he's not parting waters that exit but he will part in heaven itself the very curtain that separates you and me and provide access for any who would come and experience God for themselves what an immersive experience inexpressible light in verses 2 through 6 momentarily breaking in at that moment upon our dark world providing for you and me what we want don't you want it an experience of being in the presence of God how do we experience

God how can we get this oh to see God in this way don't don't we all long for such an experience in this world of perpetual dusk that will lead to the darkness of death I'm sure that this experience left an impression on these three disciples I'm sure they loved it and like me before Van Gogh in Manhattan I'm sure they wanted more of it and if you wonder if I'm wrong on that just look at what Peter does Peter Peter Peter's quite something the three are there talking and Peter kind of like maybe I get in on this conversation can you imagine Jesus Moses Elijah Peter said hey guys let me just interrupt for a minute

I would love to see heaven like this hang around for a minute this is unusual I would love to mark your presence and have us linger in this immersive experience I know my ticket might say I have to exit the door by 2 p.m.

but I'm looking for a little longer stay and so what does he say it's good we're here I can't wait to meet him let us make three tents one for you one for Moses and one for Elijah he didn't know what to say because he's kind of terrified but you know some people are like that you might get terrified and not say a word there are others who get terrified and can't stop talking and Peter's one of those he says look this this this this has been an amazing pop-up shop atop a mountain and I want to I want to bring three more pop-ups here as well and so heaven can linger so he goes about his own entrepreneurial pop-up shot experiential world and something happens there he had been astonished

[22:32] Jesus had been elevated to a status unconsidered before now at least on a par with the entire prophetic discourse of God speaking and saving a people Jesus now stands equal to Israel's pantheon of great ones and he wants to remember it hold on to it he wants to experience it a little longer something happens right there in the text it's really quite something sight will now give way to sound looking in verses two to six will give way to listening in seven and eight the immersive experience now gives way to a solitary voice and it's very arresting and it ought to make us question here it is question our preference of experiencing

God through the eyes of our impressioned experiences rather than with our ears and listening just take a look seven and eight I'm not making it up a cloud overshadowed them a voice came out of the cloud this is my beloved son listen to him and suddenly looking around they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus alone look becomes listen there's a transference of the immersive experience to sitting in a chair and listening to the teacher exclaim I don't know how it sounded it seems strong though to me you know I don't want to say angry but a declaration this is my beloved son beloved son the old testament of course you have this little phrase really only occurring in kind of a minor note along the way when Abraham is going to sacrifice his beloved son now Jesus with almost this kind of soft connective tissue to the old testament we see even here a hint that the beloved son the son of God the Christ has in his future this pronouncement of suffering ahead of him as Isaac had at the voice of

Abraham so here it is this is my beloved son it's a identity but to identity we add implication an implication for him suffering is ahead an implication for us we're supposed to be listening if we want to experience God not merely seeking out all the things that we might see to experience God it puts a damper on our natural desire to linger too long in the exhibit halls of subjective experience the emotional energy of what they looked at which was brought on by the experience has been suddenly replaced the pounding heart has given way to the listening ear human emotion now is subjected to human reasoning desire for more and more pop-ups that I can frequent through the day and the year to experience

God is replaced with putting myself down in a chair with an attentive ear to the voice of Jesus I've moved from standing and seeking to sitting I've moved from a love of touch and feel and sight to a solitary nature of sound this moves our desire to experience God from gazing to listening from a time at the great wolf lodge of God to a one room schoolhouse where God's word is proclaimed and there's a single teacher up front not me but the Lord through the power of the spirit in his own word his voice alone is all that's provided if you want to experience God says the voice from heaven it requires listening to Jesus it's over they've exited the experiential immersive is done

Peter finds himself beyond the exit sign he's back on the city sidewalk the cast of characters except for Jesus is gone his body is now like ours again he shares our flesh he has our frame he's nothing but what might have been previously thought to be an ordinary person the shooting stars that danced around his head have departed and the question then is what are we to make of it what holds the movements of this text together if not a longing for a similar experience to the one that

they looked at well I ran across and here it is let's get it right down to the floor where you and I can both grab hold of it there's a preschooler song I came across this week look listen and learn now I'd sing it for you but Hackley would do a better job so I'll just recite it for you look with my eyes listen with my ears sit nice and still so I can hear teacher is speaking

[29:04] I'm listening to I will be attentive in all that I do those those things have implications right even in our text they provide the connective tissue between the movements look listen and now learn what we learn really begins in verses 9 through 13 now we're learning something from that very moment there were two takeaways I'll be quick for Peter on that day two things that he learned about experiencing God one is that whatever that immersive experience or event was it was going to be tied to a later event that he wouldn't understand until the death and resurrection of Christ took place I mean that's what happens verse 9 they're coming down he charged them to tell no one I mean why would you not want anyone to experience God like this he says until the son of man had risen from the dead so they kept the question or matter to themselves questioning what rising from the dead might mean what he learned was experiencing

God and the power of heaven and the emanating light of glory is not something here that can be even replicated with your own voice you can't bear witness to this yet Peter requires my death and resurrection requires actually exiting this world you won't know what it is that I stand and fulfill the law and the prophets until I actually fulfill all of their implications in my own death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins so don't go home and tell everyone Peter about your experience with God get out of your mind this idea that I just gotta get that feeling one more time I need to well there it is he learned that secondly he learned that the event that would unlock how we experience God was closer than anyone could imagine that's what I make of this part here in verses 11 and following they asked him why did the scribe say that Elijah must come and he said to them Elijah does come first to restore all things and how is it written that the son of man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt but I tell you that Elijah has come and they did to him whatever they pleased as it was written of him he's obviously now learning something about the ministry of John the Baptist that Elijah in fulfillment of the prophetic discourse of Malachi actually was figuratively fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist not bodily reconstructed in the return of Elijah which means at this moment what he's learning is whatever that moment is that connects your glory and your death is really close because

Elijah's already come the ministry of the Baptist declaring the kingdom is already here he's already off the scene so he's learning that this is going to come quick let me ask you how do we experience God we've looked we've listened what do we need to learn where do we go there are a lot of voices out there today making different but seemingly plausible arguments on how you can experience God I hear I experience God in nature you know I like watching the alone episodes so many of those contestants look to nature for what their answer is I find it humorous but at any rate many people do you cannot just listen to nature you can listen to your heart however your heart tells you to experience

God follow follow the means of your heart you can listen to a word of prophecy spoken over you by some pastor or television preacher or even some south side minister you experience God as people do that over you you can experience them through quiet contemplation you can connect the dots of I think God's talking to me through these happenstance unrelated circumstances for some of you you might say I don't know I've given up on it I can't experience God he doesn't talk to me and he doesn't really talk to anyone if you actually want my opinion on the matter how do we all go about experiencing God is it an inner sense he spoke to me can Peter help us well this text actually can't but later in life

[34:37] Peter writes a letter that he moves beyond the lessons he learned this day to those of us who are living today and he refers to this immersive experience that he had it's quite amazing if you have a Bible and I hope you do let's see what he says for you and for me second Peter there's this moment where he's trying to talk about what the church should be looking for as they desire to experience God after all the apostles who did look at him and did see him have died and are gone from the scene in other words he's writing to say we're not going to be around here forever although we were eyewitnesses to some amazing stuff but when we're off the scene that doesn't mean you're without hope let me tell you where you look and how you listen and learn to experience

God there it is second Peter chapter one if you found it by now verse 16 he says and this is right after he says that I know I'm going to die soon so he's trying to help us out we didn't follow some

cleverly devised myth when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty for when he received honor and glory from God the father and the voice was born to him by the majestic glory this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased we ourselves heard this very voice born from heaven for we were with him on the holy mountain he's like I didn't I learned a couple lessons that way but I'm getting ready to die and I'm going to give to you what you're going to need to experience God when I'm done and gone away notice what he says and we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts what an immersive experience that would be knowing this first of all that no prophecy of scripture comes from someone's own interpretation for no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man but men who spoke from

God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit this is what he says you want to experience God once we're I know you want to see it I know you want to be on the mountain I know you love the pop-up shops I know you want to be enveloped in something your whole culture goes through daily rituals to envelop themselves in experiences but that's not the way forward we have a prophetic word more sure than his personal immersive experience you have the objective ability to read God's word and experience God on the face of Christ now this has happened to many of us here who are

Christians let me put it this way the way I wrote it down it is on the pages of scripture that my savior burns brightest before my eyes maybe we're chasing the wrong thing in this world maybe we're moving back toward religious days when there's a great move back toward that which we can see and touch and feel and smell and taste or we're moving back toward just a charismatic lost in an experience and what this text says is you got to be careful of both ends here and you really need to walk the middle road which says give me a place where the Bible is open where Jesus name is exalted where I see him fulfilling the law and the prophets and may this be my food let me just shut it down you want to experience

God do I want to experience God yes read your Bible read Mark read it every day read it in a sitting and not just Mark read Moses read Elijah read the ministry of the Baptist read it all the coherence the majesty the glory the beauty of it all begins to come together and suddenly I see Jesus on the pages of scripture and through faith I am forgiven in his perfect obedience and one day not this day not this week perhaps one day I enter through the narrow door and into a world that the children saw as ever expanding further up further in to unspeakable glories which which if they could call back to the living and say get here

[40:44] I'm seeing it until that day we walk by faith according to that which we read our heavenly father give us strength to experience you we want to experience you we want to know you we want our heart to be ablaze with the sense of your presence but may we never substitute an immersive experience of you for the ability to linger long in your word and thereby know you in Jesus name we pray amen