

The Transfiguration of Jesus

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[0 : 00] The Gospel of Mark, chapter 9, verses 1-13. Those of you who are joining us for the first time this morning, we are continuing an extended series in the Gospel of Mark.

And this morning, we have come to this section in chapter 9. The Gospel of Mark, chapter 9, beginning in verse 1.

I'm reading from the English Standard Version. 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 they 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.

[1 : 07] 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. And they asked him, Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?

And he said to them, Elijah does come first, 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?

[2 : 22] But I tell you, that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him. Let's pray together.

Father, we pause in this moment to seek your help as we listen to your word. Father, we ask that you would enable us to hear as we ought, and then to respond as we ought.

Lord, I pray, publicly, as I have done privately, that you would help me to be faithful, to proclaim your word. And Lord, remind us all of your promise, that you are the one who watches over your word, and you are standing ready to perform it, perform your word in our lives, for our good, and for your glory we pray, in Jesus' name.

Amen. When you think of the life of Jesus, what do you consider to be the important events, or the key events, in his life?

Now, I'm not asking you to shout them out, but no doubt many of you would be thinking of his birth, his baptism, his crucifixion, his resurrection, his ascension, and perhaps some of you, because we've read this passage, are thinking of the transfiguration as well.

[4 : 08] But I wonder, had we not read this passage, whether the transfiguration would have entered into some of our minds. I want to say to us this morning that the transfiguration is one of the key events in the life of Jesus.

Indeed, it is one of the high points of the life of Jesus. And here's why it is.

Here's why the transfiguration is one of the key events in the life of Jesus. The transfiguration shows us that Jesus is the divine son and the promised Messiah.

This is why it's so critical. And we can easily read it over as just something that is being reported. But in the transfiguration, we see that Jesus is the divine son and the promised Messiah.

And this is critical because what Mark is doing, remember, Mark is proclaiming a gospel to help us to see who Jesus is. He is going to end with the crucifixion of Jesus.

[5 : 18] And it's important for him to help us to see who is the one who was crucified. Who is the one who hung on the cross? And Mark's point is that he was no ordinary person.

Mark's point is the one who died and rose again is God's son. And he is the promised Messiah. And so this morning, I have two very simple points in the form of headings.

And they are, number one, Jesus, the divine son. And number two, Jesus, the promised Messiah. So let's consider the first one. Now, in order for us to really appreciate the transfiguration and what is being communicated to us, it's important for us to see that the context of the transfiguration really zeroes in on the point that Mark is seeking to make.

And the context of the transfiguration begins when Peter made his great revelation that Jesus was the Christ or that he was the Messiah. that's a bit earlier in Mark chapter 8 where Peter declares that Jesus is the Christ and Jesus says to him, don't tell anyone about this.

And although Mark's account ends there, what we know from Matthew's account is that Matthew says to Peter, Matthew says, Jesus told Peter, you did not come up with that on your own.

[6 : 53] my Father who is in heaven revealed that to you. Revealed to you who I really am. And so, in light of that, Peter, in the next few verses we see as Jesus is teaching that he is going to be crucified, he's going to be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, Peter rebukes him and says, no, far be it from you, that will never happen.

And Jesus in turn rebukes Peter and then Jesus goes on to teach what it means to follow him. And he says that to follow him, we must deny ourselves and we must take up our cross and we must follow him.

And he tells us that if we try to save our lives by not serving him, in other words, believing that by serving him we lose something and so we don't serve him, he says, you will lose your life if that's your approach to life.

And then he asks these two critical questions. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul and what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

And he ends by saying that whoever is ashamed of him in this life, he will be ashamed of them when he comes with glory and with the holy angels.

[8 : 22] And then Mark records Jesus saying something that is very puzzling in verse 1 of chapter 9.

He said to them, Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.

It's a very complex and perplexing statement of Jesus for us, obviously not for Mark and the others. He puts it there with no explanation.

But it is a it is a statement of Jesus that there are many interpretations about. Theologians differ greatly on it and I won't bog you down into all the different interpretations of what those words mean except to say two very obvious things.

Number one, all the disciples have died. We know that. That's a very obvious thing. They've all died. Jesus said there were some who were not going to die until they see the kingdom of God come with power.

[9 : 37] so all of them have died. Therefore, we can conclude that whatever Jesus meant by the kingdom of God coming in power before some of them died has already happened.

I think we can deduce that much from the passage. The disciples have died. Jesus said some of them were going to see this event before they died since they have all died.

That event must have happened. That event must have been seen by some of them. Now, of all the different interpretations about what it means for the kingdom of God coming with power, the one that seems to have the strongest indication of being right is the transfiguration.

transfiguration. The transfiguration seems to be the most I shouldn't say it that way because it makes it sound like I can pontificate on it but certainly from my own understanding of scripture at this point I would say the transfiguration seems to me to be the fulfillment of what Jesus said would take place in verse one.

Now, you may hold a different view on that and that's fine because it really is not essential to understanding this particular passage.

[11 : 07] That is debatable. Good Christians and theologians differ on that. But here's what is not debatable and here's where we don't differ.

What is not debatable is the fact that the transfiguration reveals in a powerful way that Jesus is the divine son and he is the son of God.

Now, it is true when we look at Mark's gospel that Mark opens his gospel by saying the gospel of Jesus Christ the son of God. Mark does that.

Mark also in chapter one records for us at the baptism of Jesus that a voice from heaven spoke, the father spoke from heaven and said this is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased.

He records both of those. But the transfiguration communicates this truth about who Jesus is in a far more dramatic and compelling way than Mark saying it at the beginning of his gospel or it being spoken at the baptism of Jesus.

[12 : 22] The baptism of Jesus, there were still Jews, the scribes and the Pharisees who thought that Jesus had to be sinful because he was being baptized. And even though the voice spoke that this was God's son, there was no visible evidence of that.

Not so with the transfiguration. Something more dramatic took place on the mount of transfiguration. Mark tells us in verse 2 that in the presence of Peter, James and John, Jesus was transfigured.

And in the original language, this word for transfigured is where we get our English word metamorphosis, which means to change in form.

And what Mark is saying is that Jesus on that mount, in full view of Peter, James and John, he changed. He visibly and physically changed in their sight.

Now, Mark doesn't tell us what Jesus looked like. He just simply says that he was transformed. He tells us what his clothing looked like in verse 3. That it was radiant, intensely white, whiter than anyone on earth could bleach them.

[13 : 47] It was a statement just to say this was really, really white. And what we have is a description of blazing light. Incredible, radiant light.

Now, in Matthew's account, in Matthew chapter 17 verse 2, Matthew tells us that the face of Jesus shone like the sun. And in Luke's account, Luke tells us that while Jesus was praying, in chapter 9, verse 29, while Jesus was praying, his appearance changed.

His face was altered. And I think it's important for us to slow down a bit and really see what Mark is communicating to us.

Mark is giving us really a sequence of events. And sometimes we can forget it. We can kind of think it's all conflated together. but he tells us it was Jesus, Peter, James, and John, and Jesus was transfigured.

He was transfigured before the appearance of Elijah and Moses. And I think that's important because one could kind of conclude that maybe the appearance of Moses and Elijah brought about the radiance of Jesus.

[15 : 13] But no, that's not the sequence that Mark gives us. That's not the sequence that any of the gospel writers give us. Jesus was transfigured before they appeared.

He became radiant before they came on the scene. And when they came, we have no indication that they were anything other than ordinary Moses and ordinary Elijah.

None of the gospel writers give us any indication that there was anything radiant about them. And perhaps maybe there was and they just didn't comment on it. But even if there was some extraordinary visual about them, that of Jesus overshadowed it incredibly.

That it was not even worth mentioning it. And then we read in verse 4 that Elijah and Moses were talking with Jesus.

We don't know what they were talking about from Mark's account, but in Luke's account, Luke says they were talking with him about his departure or about his exodus that he was going to soon accomplish at Jerusalem.

[16 : 34] Jerusalem. And I was thinking if there were a conversation that I could choose to say, make your pick and you can have it, I want to hear that conversation.

I'd want to hear the conversation of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus talking about this exodus that was going to be coming up. And see, here's what we have.

What we have is we have at this point the visual culmination of the redemptive purposes of God in these three iconic men. Moses!

Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. Moses and Elijah represented the old covenant. They represented in the case of Moses the law and the case of Elijah the prophets, the old covenant, and Jesus representing the new covenant.

And what we see is we see the harmony between them. We don't see any conflict between them. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets represented by Moses and Elijah.

[17 : 53] the old covenant is actually the culmination of the new covenant. No conflict here. No dispute about the two of them.

And what we see is God's full purposes coming to a climax in Jesus Christ and them talking about it, talking about this exodus, this departure out of the world.

And that departure obviously included going to Jerusalem to die, to die on the cross, and being buried, and then being raised, and then ascending. And all of this was a part of God's redemptive plan.

And it's all on display on the Mount of Transfiguration. But what Peter, James, and John saw on the Mount of Transfiguration is they saw that Jesus is greater than Moses, he is greater than Elijah, they see the, and they don't see the fullness of his glory.

What happened to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration really was just a glimpse of his glory. And I say that because I don't believe, based on all that we see in Scripture, that those three disciples could have survived seeing the naked glory of Jesus in its fullness on that mountain.

[19 : 32] This was the sun who was brighter than the sun. The S-O-N who was brighter than the S-U-N, and there's no way that they could have survived it.

unmediated to behold the full glory of Jesus. So I think what we see on the Mount of Transfiguration is a glimpse of the true glory of God, the glorious majesty of God.

And Peter refers to this in his letter in 1 Peter where he talks about being on the Mount and beholding his majesty. now we're told by Mark that Peter was terrified by all of this, but being the leader that he was, he made a suggestion to Jesus.

He said to Jesus, you know, it's good that we're here, and I think his point was, it's good that we're here as eyewitnesses. It's good that we're here. We can witness this and let us build these three tents, let's make three tents as evidence of this event.

One for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. And it's interesting that what we see is that Jesus doesn't answer him.

[20 : 57] Jesus does not respond to him. Instead, God does. Instead, God, the father responds to Peter. And the way he responds to him is by having a cloud to overshadow them on the mountain.

And out of this cloud, he then speaks and he says, this is my beloved son. Listen to him. And then we're told that suddenly the cloud lifted and all they saw was Jesus alone.

Moses and Elijah were gone and they only saw Jesus alone. Now, what are we to make of this? What are we to make in terms of the significance of all of that? God's Again, what we're to make of it is that Jesus is the divine son who is seen in a glimpse of his divine glory and although he is connected to Moses and Elijah, he's superior to them.

Although he's connected to them in redemption history, he is superior to them. Their ministry finds fulfillment in his. He is God's one and only son.

[22 : 23] And what God says is you need to listen to him. He is the one that you are to listen to. This is also a fulfillment of prophecy.

In Deuteronomy 18, 15, here's what we read. There's an ancient prophecy in Israel. It's one of the prophecies that they would have known and they were looking forward to very, very much. Deuteronomy 18, 15 through 18. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me. This is Moses speaking from among you, from your brothers.

It is to him you shall listen. Just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of assembly when you said, let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire anymore lest I die.

And the Lord said to me, they are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers and I will put my words in his mouth.

[23 : 37] He shall speak to them all that I command him. Jesus is this one who was prophesied to come, who God would raise up like Moses but certainly superior to Moses and he is the one that they are to listen to.

This is how the writer to the Hebrews puts it in Hebrews 1 verses 1 through 3. long ago at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son whom he appointed the heir of all things through whom also he created the world.

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature and he upholds the universe by the word of his power after making purification for sins he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

But Jesus is greater than Moses. He is the divine son. He is the one who is full of the radiance of the glory of God.

He is the one who is the exact imprint of his nature. The exact imprint. Not a watered-down version, not a mini version, the exact imprint of his nature.

[25 : 10] Let me just pause here to say that it is passages like this one in Hebrews 1 that helps us to build our theology about the person of Jesus Christ.

That yes, he is distinct from the Father, but he is of the same nature of the Father. This is how we build our theology to understand who Jesus Christ is.

This is what Scripture says and this is what we say. He is the exact imprint of the Father. He is the radiance of the glory of the Father.

So again, we see all of the redemptive purposes of God, culminating in Jesus Christ. And the presence of these Old Testament representatives, Moses and Elijah, with Jesus, the New Testament representative, is an excellent visual of the harmony between these two Testaments. Christians. But there's something in this account that's quite glaring and we shouldn't miss it. even after the transfiguration of Jesus, Peter's response is to equate Jesus exactly like Moses and Elijah.

[26 : 39] Even though Jesus has been transfigured before his eyes, even though he has seen the glory of Jesus in a glimpse, he wants to equate Jesus to Moses and Elijah.

And so the father corrects him by removing Moses and Elijah, leaving Jesus alone and saying, this is my beloved son. Listen to him. Now we could read this this morning and we could think that those words were spoken to Peter, James, and John.

brothers and sisters, those words spoken by the father on the Mount of Transfiguration were spoken to all people at all times in all places.

Those words spoken by God, the father saying, this is my son, listen to him. It's to all people. Not just those on the mount, it is to all people, which obviously would include all of us this morning.

And so the valid question for all of us, every single one of us, is are you listening to him? Are you listening to God's son? Are you listening to the one who was transfigured on the Mount of Transfiguration to show he is no ordinary person?

[28 : 04] He is no one who is speaking suggestions. He is no one who is just giving us some moral guidelines that we could choose to live by or not live by. No, this is God's son.

This is the one in whom the full redemptive purposes of God culminates and the father affirms him, both by the transfiguration and by the very words that he spoke, this is my son.

Listen to him. This is not like listening to Moses and choosing to obey or disobey. It's not like listening to Elijah and choosing to obey or disobey.

No, this is God's son. And we are all to be listening to him. That's the question we need to consider this morning.

Are you listening to Jesus? And when we think about listening to Jesus, it's not listening in a vacuum. It's not walking down the road and saying, Jesus, speak to me, I want to listen to you.

[29 : 08] No, is are we listening to him in the pages of scripture? Are we heeding his word? And brothers and sisters, this is all his word.

The words of Moses and Elijah, they find their fulfillment in him. As we think about are we listening to Jesus, I think a logical place to start is right with these last words that Jesus spoke right before the transfiguration.

Where he tells us the cost of following him, that we deny self, that we take up our cross, symbolic of dying to our will and dying to our own way.

And he says that if we think by rejecting him and not serving him, we gain our lives, he says no, you're going to lose it. And he tells us the better option of trying to preserve our lives is to give our lives in service for him because that is when we will truly find it and truly save it.

And then again, we need to be listening to him in those two questions, those two piercing questions. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?

[30 : 34] one of the ways I have come to really think about this, just think about it on this level. Just imagine gaining all the wealth that we have in the Bahamas.

All the wealth. It's yours. You gain it. Not the whole world right now. Just all the wealth in the Bahamas. things. Something that we won't get.

We won't get it because it belongs to other people. But even if we did get it, that's a drop in the bucket because Jesus says, if you got the whole world and you lose your very soul, you've lost. You've really not gained. And in truth, the answer to both of these questions that Jesus asked, what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? Or what can a man gain or give in exchange for his life?

The correct answer to both questions is nothing. We gain nothing. We can gain nothing. And then Jesus says in verse 38, he warns, whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation of him will the son of man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his father with his holy angels.

[32 : 03] This is God's son speaking. Are we listening to him? Are we dismissing these words and believing that we can have a different outcome from what he says?

No, the father says this is my son and you are to listen to him. And fundamentally we need to listen to Jesus for salvation.

And that's a question that we all need to consider this morning and I won't make assumptions about us. Have I listened to Jesus in salvation? Jesus plainly says I am the only way and the way, the truth, the life.

No one comes to the father, but by me. Are we listening to Jesus? Are we listening to other philosophers and other ideas?

And believing that we can have a different outcome? And for those of us who would claim this one, that we have listened to Jesus in salvation, the question would be, are we continuing to listen to Jesus as evidence that we have truly listened to him?

[33 : 17] the evidence that we have truly listened to Jesus, friends, as we are continuing to listen to him.

And this is why Jesus says in John 14, 15, if you love me, you'll keep my commandments. In other words, if you love me, you'll do what I say. If you belong to me in truth, you will do what I say. And so the transfiguration shows us that the father declares and affirms that Jesus is the beloved son to whom all people must listen.

But that's not all that we see in the transfiguration account. In the transfiguration account, we also see that Jesus is the promised Messiah. And this is my second and final point.

Messiah's mission was to come to save his people and to bring them salvation.

[34 : 27] And it's the accomplishment of this mission that engaged Jesus and Moses and Elijah in conversation. That is what they were talking about, the Exodus.

This going to Jerusalem to die. And as they're coming down the mountain, Jesus says to Peter, James, and John, don't tell anyone what you saw until the Son of Man has risen from the dead. So right in that statement, he captures both his crucifixion and his resurrection. and you may wonder why he puts that injunction on them that they are not to share that.

And the reason is that when you consider that even before the transfiguration, the Jews had these grand ideas about a political Messiah, one who would have military might and one who would restore the nation of Israel to the prominence that they thought that they deserved.

and Jesus knew that with this occurrence to share that, it would only fuel and fan the flames of this worldly political Messiah that by and large, the Jews and including some of the disciples were looking for and it would only send them further in that direction and Jesus would have no part of that.

[36 : 01] so Jesus is speaking to them and he tells them not to share this and they get fixated, they certainly did not share it, but they get fixated on the idea of rising from the dead.

And many theologians say that the reason for that is that as typical Jews they would have understood that there's going to be a general resurrection and everybody would rise to that point. So how is it that Jesus would rise before that and that was probably the question that preoccupied them. And so Jesus in verse 11 we read that they asked him why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?

No doubt because they saw Elijah on the mountain this quest was raised. Why do they say that Elijah must come first? And Jesus affirmed what the scribes were saying that Elijah does come first.

he comes to restore all things and then in verse 13 he assures them that Elijah has already come. And he says and they did to him whatever they pleased as it is written of him.

[37 : 16] Now we know from Matthew's account that the disciples understood that Jesus was referring to John the Baptist when he said Elijah has already come because John came in the spirit and the power of Elijah.

But John's ministry was rejected by the scribes and the Pharisees because he called them to repent and he called them to be baptized. And they thought that was only for Gentiles and in the end Herod beheaded him.

So they did to him whatever they chose. So the point is that the Elijah who the Pharisees and the scribes were looking for some literal rising from the dead of Elijah that's not the one who was the fulfillment of scripture.

John the Baptist was the one and they rejected him. And they were looking for the restoration of the nation of Israel to its place of great prominence political and economic prominence.

But John's work of restoration was different. John's work of restoration is described in Mark chapter one verses two and three as it is written in Isaiah the prophet behold I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way.

[38 : 49] The voice of one crying in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord make his paths straight. John's restoring work was a work that would be one of preaching and it provoked the people to say what must we do!

in light of seeing their need to repent. And so the scribes and the Pharisees missed this restoration because they missed that John the Baptist was the Elijah who was to come.

but Jesus raises a question that the disciples didn't ask in verse 12. He asked them how and how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt.

So similarly there are these two perplexing questions. This is one about how is it that the Pharisees could say that Elijah must come first. Jesus responded and told them Elijah has come.

But then he raises another question. How is it written that the Son of Man should suffer many things and be treated with contempt?

[40 : 06] And behind this question that Jesus asks is he's getting at the heart of the contradiction between what the scriptures prophesied about the Messiah that he would suffer that he would be treated with contempt and this political military Messiah this earthly Messiah that the Jews including some of the disciples had in mind.

How is it that the scripture can say this about the Messiah to fill it out now in light of what you think the Messiah ought to be?

So just very similar you see the confusion about Elijah we see the confusion also about Jesus as well and Jesus point seems to be that in the very same way that John the Baptist was killed the Messiah would likewise be killed the transfiguration brings us into sharper focus and here I think for us this point should be very clear that we can be like the scribes like the Pharisees like the disciples where we too can seek a Messiah we can seek Jesus we can view Jesus as other than what the scriptures proclaim him to be we can have a savior of our own choosing of our own making our own ideas brothers and sisters our savior is not a political king he is not a big

Santa Claus he is not a king of this world standards he is the savior king of God standards revealed in God's word the transfiguration makes this very clear so why is the transfiguration important it's important because in the transfiguration Jesus is displayed as the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan he is shown to be more than a law giver like Moses more than a prophet like Elijah he is shown to be the divine son and the promised Messiah and Mark wants us to know this is the one who is going to!

this is the one who is going to die he is no ordinary man this is the one who at the end Mark will have the centurion saying surely this man is the son of God that's the one who will die on the cross and he is the one that Mark is portraying in order that we may put our faith in him we may put our trust in him it's not just a good teacher not just a good Jew not just a good moral example this is God's son this is the one who is the exact imprint of the father's nature the one who radiates the father's glory and you trusted in Jesus this morning I pray I pray my prayer for you that I pray privately is that we would all of us who put our faith in

[43 : 37] Jesus would walk away from this time of hearing his word with deeper conviction that we have put our faith in the son of the living God we're not just serving a Christian version of Buddha or Mohammed no we are serving son of the living God and I pray that as we contemplate the

transfiguration that this would be ever so clear in our minds and a conviction in our soul and this morning if you have not trusted in Jesus my prayer is that through the transfiguration account you will see Jesus as the divine son you will see Jesus as the promised!

Messiah you will see Jesus as the one who is worthy of faith and trust and that as you do you would repent you would turn from sin and you would turn to the Lord Jesus Christ let's pray together father thank you for your word to us reminding us that Jesus Christ is your son and you call all people at all times everywhere to listen to him those of us who have listened to Jesus already in salvation I pray that our convictions will grow deeper this morning and oh Lord once again for those who have not trusted Christ would you have mercy on them would you open their eyes to the beauty and the majesty of the

Lord Jesus would you grant them the gifts of faith and repentance that they too may listen to him we ask in Jesus name amen