

# Suffering and Glory

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we're continuing our sermon series on the Gospel of Mark. We're on chapter 9. And as you're turning to that, I want to talk a little bit about an obsession that our culture has.

And that is, we are obsessed as a culture with discovering the hidden life of famous people, of wealthy people. We have an obsession with our culture of trying to look behind the scenes and see their private lives.

And the thing is, and maybe this is one of the reasons we do it, is when the real sort of private lives of people are revealed, inevitably, they don't measure up.

And in fact, often there is a dark side to their lives. And we saw an extreme case of this this week in Lance Armstrong. He had wealth.

He had celebrity status. He was very, very highly respected because of his wonderful charity work that he has done through Livestrong. And it all has come crumbling down as his private life has been revealed.

[ 1 : 10 ] And this week, if you have been with Oprah Winfrey at all, you would have seen him interviewed. And he would have admitted that his whole life, as he put it, was a lie.

And that he took performance-enhancing drugs to win all seven of his Tour de France titles. This was the dark reality of looking behind the scenes of his life.

Well, Mark 9 is looking in the private life, the behind-the-scenes life of Jesus. And it is a completely different experience for the disciples.

Jesus had become a very well-known person in Israel. In Mark 1 through 8, we've seen he has done what only God can do. He defeated Satan.

He healed the sick. He fed thousands and thousands of people out of nothing in the wilderness. He calmed the sea. He walked on water. He even cleansed lepers.

[ 2 : 16 ] And amazingly, he even raised the dead. And Mark tells us that when the crowds saw these things, they were amazed and they were astonished. But what they saw was nothing compared to what Peter, James, and John would hear and see of Jesus in that reading that we heard from Mark.

If the gospel of Mark took place today, Jesus would have all kinds of paparazzi following him around, trying to see who he was behind the scenes in his private life.

And in Peter, they would have had the perfect contact person. Because Peter was present for all of the important things that happened in Jesus' life and ministry.

He was the ideal person, inside person, who sees who Jesus really is. And we see intimate details of Jesus in our passage leading up to the one that we just heard.

So in private with friends, Peter has confessed that Jesus is the anointed one, the Messiah, the Christ. It's an amazing confession that he gives.

[ 3 : 27 ] But right afterwards, Jesus teaches him in private that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be killed and on the third day rise again.

Jesus was saying that his own great suffering and the glory that Peter was talking about go together. They belong to each other.

And this shocks Peter. And he objects. May it never be so, he says. And I think it was probably just as difficult for him to hear what Jesus said just after that.

Because he says, following me will mean taking up your cross and giving up your life for me. Only in losing your life, Jesus said, can you find real life.

And I think this was probably hard for us to hear last week when David preached the same sermon on the same passage. You see, the disciples knew that Jesus was Messiah.

[ 4 : 27 ] And they must have wondered at the end of chapter 8, how can we reconcile the glory of Jesus with his promise that he is going to be rejected and he is going to suffer?

And an even more pressing question, I think, personally for them is that if Jesus is the Messiah and we follow him, why would we have to suffer in any way?

And I think if we are honest about our own minds and our hearts, if you believe and follow Jesus as your Lord, you probably have these kinds of questions that rise up in you, in your heart from time to time.

We ask, how is it that the Jesus who we worship and we know to be God himself, how is it that he is rejected and ignored by so many people?

Why is there all these temptations for us to be ashamed of him? How can so many things that are contrary to God's will take place if Jesus has come and is the risen God for us?

[ 5 : 33 ] And why doesn't God make it easier for me to follow him? Why is it difficult? It can be very hard for me to give up my life for him. It's hard to say your will be done instead of my will be done.

And we wonder as well where God is in our own suffering. Why would suffering be part of my life in Jesus Christ? Where is he in that?

And this is because we, not just the world, but we as a church, as people who go to church, we as Christians here, we actually believe that suffering and glory are opposite things.

This is the thing that we are all tempted to think. We separate those two. It is actually a false teaching that is very, it's something that we take on ourselves.

And it's hard not to take that belief on. It's part of our human nature. And so what God reveals to the disciples is what has been hidden from everyone until now.

[ 6 : 39 ] And it's wonderful to read this revelation of the transfiguration in this season of Epiphany. Because Epiphany, it means manifestation.

It means revealing of God, of Jesus, and who he really is. I don't know if you know this, but yesterday was the day of Epiphany for Orthodox believers.

And if you are in Russia, there is a tradition that you would cut a hole in the ice. It's a beautiful hole. It looks like a cross, an Orthodox cross.

And you would jump into that freezing water in the lake and hopefully come back out as well. And this happened in Moscow yesterday.

It was 15 below zero. And they interviewed some of the people who did it. Why do you do it? What was it like? Well, the tradition is there because you are reminded of the overwhelming nature of the glory of God in jumping into this overwhelmingly cold water.

[ 7 : 41 ] You're reminded of baptism revealing who Jesus is for us in our unity with him. And people say when they go in there that at first it's cold, but then they feel very warm.

And they say we feel very alive as well. But I think that's only if you actually make it out alive that you say that. But it is a picture of what is happening here in this passage of the transfiguration.

This overwhelming vision of the glory of Jesus Christ. It is inexpressible. And in our passage, Jesus takes three disciples, Peter, James, and John, to reveal and to manifest his glory at the top of a mountain.

And it really is literally the high point of Mark. It's at the highest place. But it is in a literary way the high point as well because God is going to strengthen his disciples by a revolutionary, world-changing truth.

That Jesus' suffering that he has been talking about and his glory belong together. They can't be separated out. It's a very powerful thing for us to witness.

[ 8 : 52 ] So let's look at verse 2 and 3. They're at the top of the mountain. Mark describes very briefly this incredible scene. It's only in a sentence or two. It says, For a brief time, God lifts the humanity of Jesus that veiled his glory and an unearthly light shines out from Jesus.

And Peter said that even the radiant whiteness of the clothes that he was wearing couldn't be compared to anything on earth. It was an unearthly brilliance.

And that's because Peter was getting a glimpse of the glory of God that is rarely revealed on earth. In the book of Exodus, Moses saw God's glory when he was at the top of Mount Sinai, if you remember.

For six days, he is enveloped by the glory of the Lord at the top of Mount Sinai. And even down at the bottom of the mountain, the Israelites are looking up at the top.

The appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire, Exodus says, on top of that mountain, even from that distance. And in the Old Testament, the glory of God is always revealed as brilliant light.

[10:15] God gives that same glory that we see in the Old Testament to Jesus so that it radiates out of him. It's not reflected.

It's radiating out from within him. He is the source of glory. And it is indescribable. When Peter speaks of this change in Jesus in our first reading from 2 Peter, he describes it this way.

He says that we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. That's the closest he had become. He says, I was seeing majesty. And what he meant was that it was so beautiful and so powerful that it was frightening.

He was seeing on the mountain the light of power beyond anyone's imagining. He was seeing on that mountain truth that is beyond human comprehension.

He was seeing love beyond even our deepest longings. And he was seeing justice that was well beyond the wisest human wisdom that we can think of.

[11:21] All that is most beautiful and good in the world can only dimly compare to the beauty and the goodness of God's glory that shines from Jesus Christ.

This is what he was seeing. And that just begins to describe what Peter, James, and John were seeing in Jesus. And the most advanced technological team that does special effects in Hollywood could not do justice to that.

Even with the limitless budget that they could have, they could not portray even a little taste of what they were seeing in that short time. But not only did they see light, the light of Jesus, as he radiated that glory, Elijah with Moses appears to them.

And they have an audience with King Jesus. And they speak with him. You can imagine what this might mean for the disciples. They knew the scriptures.

And here were the two most important figures in all of the Bible who had both experienced the glory of God on top of a mountain themselves. And they're speaking with Jesus in his glory.

[12:34] It's a picture of what Jesus said of himself to the Pharisees in John 5:39. He said, look, you look at the scriptures. You're looking for eternal life. But it is they that bear witness about me.

And that is what's happening here. Moses and Elijah are bearing witness to Jesus Christ. And God's people were longing for what the great hero of the Bible, Moses, would say would happen one day on a great day.

He said in Deuteronomy 18:15 that the Lord will raise up for you a prophet like me. As great as Moses is and better from among you, from your brothers, it is to him that you shall listen.

And they longed for Malachi 4, the last two verses of the Bible, where it says, Behold, I will send to you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes, and he will turn the hearts of their fathers to their sons, to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.

And they must have said this was it. The disciples were seeing the day of the Lord taking place right before their eyes on that mountain. And I love what happens next because Peter, who is the eyewitness for Mark, who wrote the gospel, tells this story on himself.

[13:57] And Peter, who is a man of impulsive action, says, Okay, I need to mark this occasion, how important it is. I've got to say something. He says, The first thing on his mind, Rabbi, it is good that we are here.

Let's make three tents for you and for Elijah and for Moses. And Mark, in verse 6, says, You know, yes, that was a bit inappropriate. Let's give him a break here.

He says, He really didn't know what he was going to say. He was terrified. Let's give him a free pass. And I imagine that those were Peter's exact words because James and John would never have let him forget what he said.

He called, You called the majesty, the glory of Jesus, you called him rabbi after seeing all that? How could you? He said, What kind of tents could possibly do justice to the glory that we have seen in Jesus?

How could you contain that? But there really is something of good sense in what Peter is saying as well. Because the fulfillment of all that Moses and Elijah were looking forward to was there in Jesus Christ.

[15:08] It really must have looked like the day of the Lord. And he wanted to keep the moment going. He wanted to let everyone know about this glory that needed to be known.

And I think it's God's patience and his mercy and his love that he audibly speaks to these three disciples.

He chooses to speak to them and explain what has happened in front of them. And so the Bible goes on to say here that a cloud overshadowed them.

And throughout scripture, a cloud is always a symbol of God's presence, of his living presence, and his glory. And a voice comes out of that cloud.

And here's what it says. It says, This is my beloved son. Listen to him. And the sense in the original is keep on listening to him.

[16:07] In other words, keep on following him. Keep on trusting in him. Keep on following this one that you have seen glorified.

And that means that the disciples were tempted not to follow. They were tempted not to listen. Especially when he spoke of his suffering and the suffering that they were called to.

And even now, it would make perfect sense for them to Jesus to grab hold of that glory. To keep going and show everyone who he is. But God says, persevere with Jesus.

This is what he says to them. Because his glory is actually the substance of his suffering. The suffering that he will undergo.

The rejection. The sacrifice. All of this will happen is part of the substance of his glory. That is revolutionary.

[17:05] That is unheard of in this world. And God tells them that in all that Jesus will go through. In all that the disciples will go through. Jesus is his well beloved son.

And according to God's audible word here. Jesus suffering does not mean that God abandons him. It's quite the opposite. It means that he is in perfect fellowship with him.

The suffering of Jesus is actually a sign and an expression of the love and the glory. Between God the father and God the son. And then suddenly, right after God speaks.

It all ends. The incredible experience stops. Just like a light switch being turned off. And the disciples look around, the Bible says here. And they see that Jesus is the only one with them.

And that he is going to be leading them down the mountainside. And when he walks with them, Jesus tells them. Don't tell anyone what you've seen.

[18:13] Don't tell anyone until the son of man has risen from the dead. Jesus is saying here that as he is walking down the mountain.

He is walking down to his death. And to his resurrection. And he is telling them that his glory is not just that bright, shiny power and goodness that they witnessed.

It is also that love, grace, beauty, and power of God humbled and bleeding on a cross. And we actually say this in our times of worship together.

When we take communion, we celebrate Jesus saying, This is my body which is broken for you. This is my blood which is shed for you.

We are seeing and witnessing his suffering. His deep suffering and death for us. And at the same time we glorify him. We say, Holy, holy, holy. All the heaven and the earth is filled with your glory.

[19:14] Hosanna. We are putting God's glory and his suffering together as we receive communion. And that's because Jesus' suffering in obedience to God earns us his glory.

It is the substance of that glory. We will share in that glory with him forever. And the disciples can't really understand this until Jesus rises from the dead.

Only then can they see what we see in the gospels. Jesus' suffering from God's perspective. And see the glory of Jesus in his death.

Well, the disciples still don't quite get this. And as we get to the end of our passage here, they question what the rising from the dead might mean.

And they wonder whether Jesus the Messiah really needed to suffer. Does it have to happen? And they knew the teaching that Elijah would come to prepare for the day of the Lord. To bring repentance and righteousness before the Messiah comes.

[20:15] And they asked Jesus in verse 11, Why did the scribes say Elijah must come first before the Messiah? In other words, if the scribes are right, Jesus, the Messiah, you won't have to suffer.

Elijah will straighten things out. And Jesus says this. He says, Yes, the scribes are right. Elijah does come first to restore all things.

And then he says, 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

please, as it is written of him.

Well, Matthew 17, 13 tells us here that Jesus was talking about John the Baptist being the Elijah who was preparing the way for the Messiah. And we know that John the Baptist has suffered. He has died at the hands of Herod. And he has died in the role of Elijah. And so what happens here at the end of this passage is that Jesus is saying both Elijah and the Messiah must suffer many things and be treated with contempt.

[ 21 : 30 ] And so you see what's happening as we leave this passage is there is this amazing truth that we go away with. And that is that the suffering and the glory of Jesus cannot be separated.

They belong together. Jesus' rejection, the physical and spiritual suffering of the cross are as much a part of his glory as the powerful beauty of the transfiguration.

And behind that pain and the disfigurement of Jesus that the disciples will witness as he goes to the cross, behind that suffering, there is the light of the glory of that mountain in Jesus and in that suffering.

Because in going through this, he lives out the will and the love of the Father. And he brings you and I to share in that glory through the forgiveness of our sins.

This is glorious. And so my prayer is that the transfiguration of Jesus in this passage will strengthen you and encourage you today, especially if you find it hard to follow Jesus.

[ 22 : 40 ] The disciples were in the same place. It was hard for them to hear Jesus say that he would suffer and that they would also have to carry their cross and give up their lives. But Jesus gives them a tremendous, a glimpse of his tremendous glory so that they would know that they will one day share in that glory because of his suffering.

And I think that you and I need to have that vision of God's glory, of Jesus' glory, his shiny, brilliant glory before us all the time.

It's one of the purposes of this season of epiphany that we are in, that we would be strengthened by the revealing of Jesus' glory. Preaching and our own Bible study and our prayer is meant to restore the throne of Jesus and his majesty in our souls.

to bring that vision before us. Paul says very clearly in Romans 8.18 that that vision changes the way that we live in this world, the way that we suffer.

He says in Romans 8.18, for I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed into us.

[ 23 : 54 ] Now Paul is not minimizing suffering. He experienced suffering in spades. But he is saying that God's glory, the glory of Jesus that will be revealed into us is so incredible that it makes our sufferings like nothing.

It shows the greatness of his glory. And when Jesus comes again in his glory that was revealed in our passage, that glory will envelop us.

It will overtake us is the sense of that verse in the most wonderful way in the resurrection of our bodies. It's a gift that only comes to us because Jesus suffered for us.

And that glory is greater than all the things that we have a hard time letting go of. It is worth living for. It is worth sacrificing for. And when you serve Jesus, when you trust him with your own suffering, when you daily give your life over to him, you are following Jesus to God and to his glory. That is your end. That is your goal. That is what is before you. And not only that, you give, in seeing this vision of Jesus' glory, you say, that is the one thing worth giving glory to in my life.

[ 25 : 12 ] This is the one thing worth glorifying in all that I do and say and think. And that is God's great purpose for your life.

To see his glory and to live for the praise of that glory. So in the midst of our world whose glories seem very enticing to us, God's voice is speaking to you and to me.

This is my beloved son. Keep listening to him. He is worth listening to because that glory of our Lord Jesus Christ is for us now.

It means he is the source of overflowing grace now for us in our lives. So much so that when I see people in this congregation suffering with faith in Jesus Christ, I see the glory of God so very, very clearly.

My own faith is strengthened. I am amazed at the wonderful work of God in those people. And today, God is saying, come to Jesus and his word with as big a container as you possibly can as we've been talking about so that you can be filled with his goodness both now and in your life to come.

[ 26 : 28 ] For the glory of Jesus is endless. It is bright. It is beyond everything that we can imagine. May we praise, we may live our lives to the praise of his glory.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.