

Mark 9:2-13

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[0 : 00] You will find it to help if you open the Bible to Mark chapter 9 that was just read for us, the scene of the transfiguration, page 844.

And you could tell by my prayer then that it's very off, very easy to go in many different directions with the transfiguration.

This is one of those passages in the Bible that if it wasn't true, we'd want it to be true. Jesus takes us behind the door, not just behind the door of death, but behind the door into heaven itself, and we see Jesus from God's perspective.

We have a glimpse of his divine nature. And as the veil is pulled aside for a moment, we realize that there's something going on in this world and with Jesus Christ and in our lives that is bigger and far more important than anything we could have imagined or hoped for.

When my youngest son turned four, we had a Saturday where we did everything that a four-year-old could possibly ever want to do. And at the end of the day, I think we were sitting in the burger joint somewhere in Kerrisdale, and he looked up at me and he said, Daddy, it's been a very big day, Daddy.

[1 : 24] And I feel that's what the disciples would say at the end of this day on the mountain. So here we are in the middle of the gospel, in the middle of rejection by the leaders, misunderstanding and hostility from the disciples.

And in his great kindness, Jesus shows them more than they had bargained for, why he is worth following and what following him is all about.

So let's dive in. The passage teaches us two main things. And the first thing it teaches us is that suffering and glory are inseparably bound together.

But the first verse, in verse 2, Mark tells us the transfiguration is tied very closely to what we looked at last week in chapter 8.

And after six days, Jesus took them up, took with him Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them.

[2 : 31] Six days after what? Six days after Peter confessed Jesus to be the Christ, Jesus announced his intention to go to Jerusalem, to suffer and to die, and then called on his disciples to take up their cross, deny themselves and follow him.

And it had been a terrible day for the disciples. Six days ago. It had begun pretty well. And Peter had finally confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the King of God, in chapter 8, verse 29.

And immediately Jesus announces that he's going to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the Jewish leaders. He'll be murdered. And three days later, he'll rise again.

And do you remember last week? Peter absolutely blows a fuse. He says, you cannot be serious. You cannot speak like that, Jesus. I refuse to listen to that.

It's ridiculous. And Jesus rebukes Peter fiercely. In verse 32, he says, get behind me, Satan. Not something I encourage you to use in your rebukes.

[3 : 41] He says, you're setting your mind on not on the things of God, but on the things of man. And even more worrying for Peter and the disciples is Jesus then spells out very clearly for everyone who's going to follow him what it means.

That all who will come after him have to lose their lives for him and for the gospel. And that's the only way we will receive our lives. And I think we shouldn't underestimate this.

There's real tension and strain between the disciples and Jesus. There's conflict going on and it has not been resolved. They still think Jesus is wrong about all this suffering and dying business.

And they can't get past it. Very next thing we read in the text, six days later. Jesus takes three of them up the mountain and is transfigured.

And by doing this, what he does is he forever unites suffering and glory. Because the Jesus who is going to suffer is the same Jesus who takes them up to the mountain and shines with the inner glory of God.

[4 : 47] The mountain is an action of great kindness and revelation. For Jesus to reveal his true glory right after announcing his suffering. And they can't believe it.

They can't accept it. Just like we don't. And this word transfigured just means transformed, changed from the inside out.

It's not the clothing of Jesus that changes. It's Jesus himself. He reveals his inner glory and divinity. And such is the brilliance and radiance.

It cannot be compared to anything in this world because it's the light of heaven itself. Now tangible, visible and observable. And as Mark describes what cannot be described, and it's just so simply described, we read that Moses and Elijah joined Jesus on top of the mountain walking and talking with him.

It's a little foretaste of Jesus' defeat of death. That the suffering of death is going to crush and triumph over death.

[5 : 55] And this one who suffers is actually in charge of death. Death before him will run and flee. And here are two servants of God, real people, Moses and Elijah.

And they're on the other side of death. But their essential identities and their personalities are completely intact with God. They gave their lives in the service of God.

They were not ashamed of Christ in this world. They suffered rejection and persecution for the name of Christ, we read. And now they're in glory. And they're known and they're held in the eternal grip of God's grace.

And it's just a little foretaste what happens to all who trust in Christ. We will be delivered from death by his death. And nothing can ever separate Moses and Elijah from the love of God in Christ Jesus. And they're up there on the mountain. And we know that God is working his long purposes throughout history. And when you pull aside the veil and see things from the perspective of heaven, God is moving things forward toward the defeat of death and sin and Satan as he draws us into his own presence to enjoy the personal glory of Jesus Christ.

[7 : 19] I mean, what a privilege for Moses and Elijah. I mean, hundreds of years ago, there they were testifying to the coming of Christ. Both of them had the experience of meeting God on top of Mount Sinai.

Both of them gave their lives to pointing toward the Christ. They've been at rest with God for hundreds of years. And now they get to talk to the Messiah, Son of God. And it's almost casual talking.

They're chatting with Jesus. And this is the heavenly world where Jesus belongs. This is where he came from. This is where he's taking us.

The one who dwells in unapproachable light from eternity past, who's just as comfortable with the angels worshipping him as he is with living and loving with his disciples, who think he is wrong and keep rebuking him and just don't get it, and who in the end will betray him.

And then the cloud of God comes, the same cloud that filled the temple and tabernacle in the Old Testament with the presence of God and overshadows them.

[8 : 28] And God speaks audibly. Here is the message from the heart of God. Verse 7. This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.

And by saying that, God makes suffering and glory inseparable. Twice in this gospel, God the Father speaks. We have the astonishing privilege of hearing the voice of God from heaven. And what is it that God wants to say to his world? What burns close to the heart of God? What is it that the world most needs to hear?

Jesus is the Son whom God loves, and we should listen to him. That's it. And what's so wonderful about this is that the words spoken by God are not to make us tingle with amazement.

They have a very practical purpose. We don't have to invent the application of this passage. God gives it to us. He directs the disciples and us back to the person of Jesus and to the words that he spoke six days before.

[9 : 35] Listen to him. And in the midst of Jesus' glory, God drives us back to his suffering. Now, that means that the transfiguration is a massive correction to how we read the challenges in chapter 8.

So I just want to hold the challenges up to you for a moment, please. If you'd look back at chapter 8, I want to remind you of these words. Verse 34.

8, 34. Calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them. These are very familiar words I know. If anyone would come after him, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? What can a man give in return for his soul? And the voice of God calls us to listen at the very point we recoil from.

[10:43] See, we think we need to invest in ourselves. That even if we're not going to gain the whole world, we ought to give it a good shot to gain a little bit of it, right?

That the way forward is to validate myself and to advance my essential self, my soul. To do everything I can to preserve and protect and promote my identity, myself. Which is one of the reasons we're all so exhausted. Because we are told, you can do it, you can do it. We try harder, we jump higher, we climb faster. And all our hearts echo the wisdom of the world. We think to ourselves, self-sacrifice cannot be the way we'll find our true selves. Particularly self-sacrifice for Jesus. What happens on the mountain shows that in God's purposes, suffering is the way to glory.

Dying is the way to live. Giving is the way of receiving. It's very, it's remarkable. Archbishop Ramsey, who was the 100th Archbishop of Canterbury, he was a good one.

[11:54] Very good Archbishop of Canterbury. Never know, he was a good one. He said this about the transfiguration. About this passage. The living and dead are one in Christ.

The old covenant and new are inseparable. The cross and glory are of one. The age to come is already here.

Our human nature has a destiny of glory. And that in Christ, the final word is uttered. And in him alone, the Father is well pleased. It's a lot, isn't it?

It's all of the New Testament. However, the simple point I'm trying to make, and I think the passage makes, is that suffering and glory inseparably are bound together.

And the second point that transfiguration makes is this. That Jesus and his disciples are inseparably bound to glory. I mean, this passage, this is different than anything else that's happened so far in the gospel.

[13:01] I mean, throughout the gospel, Jesus has revealed his glory by calming the storm or feeding the 5,000 or raising the dead. But this is different. This is intimate and personal, revealing his true nature.

He wants his disciples to see him and to know him. And to know the eternal love between the Father and the Son and to be brought into this presence of God and to share that life and love together.

And this is his way of binding himself to them as they still argue about his priorities. Interesting. I mean, if you just read it through, the transfiguration didn't happen for Jesus' benefit.

It happens for the benefit of the disciples. Just notice the way it's written. They are the focus of the experience. Verse 2. Jesus takes them up a high mountain by themselves.

He's transfigured before them. The cloud overshadows them. God the Father speaks to them. And Peter, wonderfully, he can't resist putting his foot in his mouth.

[14:08] I mean, he hasn't spoken since chapter 8, verse 32, when he told Jesus off. And now his first word to Jesus is, Rabbi. And we say, really?

Is that the best you can come up with? When you just, you confess Jesus to be the Messiah, 10 verses of God. Verses, sorry, verses ago. And now you are in the midst of the glory of Jesus Christ seeing it with Elijah and Moses.

And you call him Rabbi? And we read, he is literally terrified and doesn't know what to say. My brother-in-law reminded me yesterday that there was an old preacher who was not very biblical, who preached in London on the fact that we need to make three tabernacles.

We need to make three tents, one for Jesus and one for Elijah and one for Moses. But he didn't read the next phrase, which says he didn't know what he was saying. Peter is literally terrified.

And he knows that God has promised to come and tabernacle with his people. And so he suggests these three tents for the heavenly guests in Jesus.

[15:26] God has already provided a permanent tabernacle, of course, where he'll dwell with his people forever. It's the physical body of Jesus Christ. But it's such a beautiful moment because Jesus doesn't rebuke Peter.

He doesn't take Peter aside and say, Peter, you've got to stop trying to control things. The dreaded MC imperative. But God himself speaks and he binds the disciples to Jesus and he says, this is my beloved son, listen to him.

And if we listen to what he said in chapter 8, we discover that Jesus' intention is to unite us with himself. Take chapter 8, verse 35. Whoever would save his life will lose it.

Now just think about this with me for a moment. You could not imagine a more gracious warning from Jesus. If you follow the wisdom of the world or the wisdom of your heart, we will all try to preserve and protect and promote our essential self.

And Jesus says if you do that, you will lose it. Your life, your soul, is the very kind of thing you cannot save by trying to save it.

[16:42] It can only be saved as we give it to him. Christ alone has the power and authority. Christ alone has the sufficient weight and glory to save our lives, which is why he came.

These words in chapter 8 that we struggle with come out of a deep love of Jesus Christ. What he is offering us is not a deal.

It's not an equal exchange where we give him our lives and he gives us something back a little bit extra. What he is offering us is pure gift.

Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it. Think about it. It's lost anyway. We couldn't save it.

And then we hear the great good news of the gospel that Christ will come and save our lives, which were lost. And all he says is give your life to me. It's no real loss if we lose our lives to Jesus Christ.

[17:41] He offers us the one thing we cannot gain ourselves. I mean the story of the gospel of Mark is of a world that lives under the shadow of death, leprosy and illness and sin and Satan.

And death is at work in the bodies and the hearts of everybody in the gospel, including the religious leaders. And Christ comes with all the power of the kingdom of God, cleansing from leprosy, healing from illness, delivering from death and forgiving from sin and casting out demons.

Which is a happy thing. It does make me want to sing. I feel this. I've forgotten what the name of those fireworks are that you nail to a fence.

Fireworks are illegal now. And they spin around and go off in all directions. Thank you. The passage is like this. It's got so much in it. To lose your life to Jesus, to stop seeking your life in everything apart from him, comes because this is who we worship.

Christ alone is worthy of our faith and our hope and our love. He alone can bring us into the presence of God. He alone can impart the presence of God. And that means that glory is not just reserved for the future.

[19:07] It becomes part of our experience now in the midst of suffering. Really. You know this word transfiguration, transformation is used twice else in the New Testament in both times.

It refers not to Jesus but to us. And to the ongoing transformation that happens in our lives as we draw closer to Jesus Christ. As we look to him, as we learn more about him.

We too are transformed from one degree of glory to another. As we are united more closely with Jesus, we have a sense of this glory on our hearts.

Even in the midst of our doubts and difficulties. We are sorrowful and yet rejoicing. We want to know the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings.

Because we know that these light momentary afflictions are producing for us an eternal weight of glory. It's amazing. And I just have two things as we finish.

[20:12] The first has to do with as they come down from the mountain. Did you notice in verses 9 to 13, they're still stuck on this whole suffering thing. We never get past this.

In verse 10, they can't get their minds around the fact of what Jesus means by rising from the dead. Now they've heard the clear announcement in chapter 8 that he's going to die. They don't believe it. And now as they come down from the mountain with the voice of God ringing in their ears, they feel more deeply. The way ahead for them and for Jesus is not the path of suffering but the path of glory.

Understand? They've got the wrong end of the stick out of the transfiguration. So their central preoccupation over the next two chapters is what?

It's which among them is the greatest? Who's the best? Who's going to have the most important seat with Jesus? Even though they've been in the glory of Jesus Christ up on the mountain, they still want the glory but they don't want the suffering.

[21 : 17] And so the talk of resurrection bamboozles them because to be raised you have to die. And so they don't know what to do when they ask him about Elijah. Elijah. And Jesus wonderfully and simply points out Elijah and his ministry was a ministry of suffering as well.

Talking about John the Baptist. They did to him as they wanted. Executed in a grubby prison cell. And so the Son of Man will suffer as well. And as you come to the foot of the mountain, we'll look at this next week, we suddenly find what a mess the disciples are making.

Jesus comes in in his grace and love. So that's the first thing as they come down from the mountain, they still don't get it. The second thing I just want to point out is that Jesus does in fact come down from the mountain.

He didn't need to. He could have just walked off into the glory without the suffering. There's great encouragement here for us.

The one who belongs to the heavenly realm humbled himself and came and became one of us. And even more, he came to serve us and to give his life.

[22 : 29] This Jesus, who glows with the eternal glory of God the Father, remains in the world, comes down from the mountain, goes to the Garden of Gethsemane, is rejected and hated and suffers brutally and executed to leave a band of disciples who belong both to this world and to the heavenly world.

And we are the disciples today. We are the ones who have our minds, we keep having our minds fixed on human things and not the things of God.

And the application for us is what would it mean if we were to listen to him, if we were to heed the word of the Father toward this Jesus Christ? What does it mean for us to heed his words, to hear his words, to receive them into our hearts so that we might be transformed?

That's the question the passage asks us. Amen. Amen. Amen.