

# Mark 9:2-29

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] All right, we're back in Mark tonight, our series in Mark. We're going to jump into Mark chapter 9 tonight. So if you want to turn there in the Black Pew Bible, it's page 844.

I think we'll have it on the screens over. Yep, we'll have it up on the screens too. But if you want to turn there, Mark chapter 9, we're going to look at verses 2 through 29, kind of a big chunk tonight, but I hope we'll see that they hang together in important ways.

Page 844 in the Pew Bible. That song we just sang is actually a fitting introduction to this text because the themes of that song is basically what the end of chapter 8 is about, about Christ saying, if you're going to follow me, you need to take up your cross and come after me, and that you'll only find your life if you lose it.

And then Mark records this in chapter 9, verse 2. 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 no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus.

[ 1 : 1 9 ] 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.

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?

But I tell you that Elijah has come. And they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him. And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them and scribes arguing with them.

[ 2 : 2 5 ] And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them, what are you arguing about with them? And someone from the crowd answered him, teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute.

And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out. And they were not able. And he answered them, oh, faithless generation, how long am I to be with you?

How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me. And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth.

And Jesus asked his father, how long has this been happening to him? And he said, from childhood, and it has often cast him into fire and into water to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.

And Jesus said to him, if you can, all things are possible for the one who believes. Immediately, the father of the child cried out and said, I believe, help my unbelief.

[ 3 : 3 5 ] And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, you mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.

And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out and the boy was like a corpse so that most of them said, he is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up and he arose.

And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, why are you going to be why could we not cast it out? And he said to them, this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer. So tonight, let me ask us a question. Who do we listen to? Who do you listen to? I don't mean what radio station do you like.

I mean, on a deeper level, at the heart level, who are you listening to? Whose voice is running in your head? Because, you know, all of us are listening to someone at that level, right?

[ 4 : 39 ] Maybe it's your parents. Maybe it's their voice you hear, you know, whether you like it or not, when you're about to make a decision or when you get down to what makes you who you are and what gives you worth.

Maybe you hear your parents' voice in your mind. Or maybe the voice that you're listening to are your peers. Maybe the voice of your friends or your colleagues or your neighbors.

Maybe that's what's running and always running sort of in the background. That voice approving or disapproving of this or that and shaping what you value or what you pursue. Maybe you're listening to your peers.

Maybe that's who you're listening to. Or maybe it's some figure that you respect. Maybe a teacher or a boss or a mentor or a coach that you've had along the way. Or maybe a historical figure that you really admire, whose works you've read, whose life you seek to emulate.

Maybe that's who you listen to. Some sort of hero in your life. Or maybe it's none of those. Maybe you pride yourself on not listening to anyone, ultimately.

[ 5 : 43 ] Not listening to anyone but yourself. Ah, and there's some truth to that for all of us, isn't there? Paul Tripp, who's a pastor and a writer, has often said, you are the most influential person in your life because you are always talking to yourself.

Do you see the point he's trying to make? Whose talk are you listening to? That's who's going to be most influential in your life. That voice will profoundly shape how you view yourself, your world, how you view God, what you make of right and wrong, what's good and beautiful and true, what to pursue, what to attract, what to reject, what to approve of, and what to condemn.

Who are we listening to? And this dynamic happens not just on the individual level, but on a cultural level too. Aren't there cultural narratives or sort of stories that we share and that we listen to that shape our identity and our values?

Just think of the classic sort of narrative of the American dream. What is it? Work hard, keep your nose out of trouble, and you will be successful and comfortable.

And yet, we know that that's not always the case. Sometimes we work hard and we keep our noses out of trouble. And yet, we experience hardship and affliction and loss.

[ 7 : 09 ] But we've been listening to those voices for so long telling us that hard work must equal success and comfort that when it doesn't work out that way, what happens?

We get bitter and angry and we start to blame others, or we start blaming ourselves and beating ourselves up, and we fall into depression and despair. You know, the same thing can happen spiritually, actually.

We can buy into certain spiritual narratives and sort of keep on listening to them, even when they're not at all what God has revealed to be true. A number of years ago, two sociologists from UNC Chapel Hill did a study of the spirituality of young people, of teenagers, and then they actually did one a little later of young emerging adults.

And here's what they found most of them believed. Here's how I would sum it up, anyway. They found in this sort of sociological survey that most people believed that God's main goal is to eliminate all of my discomforts and solve my problems.

And if I do my part, if I'm good and nice and fair, then God will bless me with a happy, comfortable life. And if I'm good, I get to go to heaven when I die.

[ 8 : 16 ] Now, is that the narrative that we should be listening to? We've been studying the Gospel of Mark through the fall and now into the spring, and if you've been with us, you know that that narrative, my job is to live a good life and God's job is to fix my problems for me, doesn't square practically at all with the life and message of Jesus.

What Jesus calls the Gospel, the good news, what Jesus calls the kingdom of God, God's reign, is almost utterly opposed to that.

Last week, Jesus told his disciples back in chapter 8 that himself, as the Christ, as the Messiah, as the true King, that his mission meant the cross.

And then he went on to say, perhaps even more shockingly, that our calling as his disciples meant nothing less than taking up our cross as well.

But you know, that wasn't the spiritual narrative that the disciples had been listening to. Like so many of the other sort of Jewish people in that time, to them, the Messiah's job was to come and to triumph and to conquer, not to suffer.

[ 9 : 36 ] And that their place in God's kingdom would be determined by how worthy and faithful they were to him. That kind of sounds a lot like our default position, doesn't it?

And you know, these voices that we listen to, whether individually, from our parents or peers or heroes, or whether communally, those sort of cultural and spiritual narratives that we share, the truth about those things is that they die hard.

We can hear alternative truths again and again and again, but they just don't get through. So in our text tonight, Jesus takes Peter and James and John up on a mountain by themselves.

And when they're up there, Mark says in very succinct language, he's transfigured before them. That is, his appearance is transformed.

That's what the word transfigured means. It's the same word for transformation. This humble rabbi from Galilee is now blazing white before them.

[ 10 : 47 ] Don't you love that earthy detail that Mark gives? He was so white, whiter than anyone could possibly bleach their clothes. You see, for a moment, Jesus is revealing to them his divine nature.

And what happens in verse 7? A cloud comes down upon them. It's just like Exodus, if you remember the Exodus story, when God appears to Moses and Israel at Mount Sinai in brightness, in fire, and in a cloud.

And that cloud is just like the cloud that would come down in the Old Testament on the tabernacle and the temple, the very representation of God's own presence.

So you see, what's happening here on the mountain is that for a moment, the curtain is being drawn back. For a moment, the eternal glory of the divine Son of God, hidden in human flesh, comes blazing through.

Jesus reveals it to them, and they see it. But then something else happens. They also see Moses and Elijah.

[ 11 : 55 ] These two great pillars of Israel's faith. And the great pillars of the Old Testament Scripture as well. Moses, of course, representing the law, the first five books. And Elijah representing the prophets.

And Peter, seeing all this, is terrified. And in classic Peter fashion, instead of being terrified and remaining silent, he's terrified and says something, which is sort of always how it goes with Peter. And he says, let's make three tents for each one of you equally. And let's stay here forever, and let's commemorate all three of you. And then God's voice comes from the cloud.

This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him. Or we might better say, listen to Him. You see, Moses and Elijah are there to point to Jesus.

As if to say that He is the fulfillment of all that they had spoken about. That Jesus Himself is, as it were, the true and final prophet.

[ 12 : 59 ] The true bringer of God's word. That the law and the prophets point to and are fulfilled in Him. You notice at the end of this story of the transfiguration, who's left?

Jesus. Alone. It's like the book of Hebrews says, if you've been coming in the morning to our series in Hebrews. Do you remember how the book of Hebrews starts? Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, like Moses and Elijah.

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. Listen to Him.

If you remember Jesus' baptism back in Mark chapter 1, there are similar words, right? The skies rip open and there's a voice from heaven that says, This is my beloved Son.

With you, I am well pleased. There and here in Mark chapter 9, God the Father is affirming the divine identity of Jesus. But you know, at the baptism, it almost seemed as if those words were directed to Jesus, as much as to us or as much as to the disciples.

[ 14 : 09 ] But now, you see, on the mountain, with Moses and Elijah standing by, it's a command to us. This is my beloved Son.

Listen to Him. Listen to Him who fulfills all that the prophets spoke about. Listen to Him who is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of God's nature.

Now, put yourself in the disciples' shoes for a second. Jesus has just told them in chapter 8 that the way of the kingdom is the way of the cross. That the path of glory is actually the path of sacrifice and suffering.

That to gain our life, we have to lose it. And doesn't that cut against every single other voice that we listen to?

So, are these just the ravings of a misguided rabbi from Galilee? Or are they the very message of life from God Himself?

[ 15 : 16 ] And in the transfiguration, we see the answer. The glory of Jesus is revealed. The Old Testament heroes show up.

And the voice of God speaks. Listen to Him. What He's told you is true. And that means we should listen to Him when our families are telling us that our plans to follow Christ would mean to them throwing their lives away.

And we should listen to Him when our heroes are telling us that greatness is found in power and achievement and self-improvement. And instead, we should listen to Him when our peers are telling us that you only live once and you've got to seek as much pleasure now in this life before it's too late.

And we should listen to Him even when the broader world is telling us that God ought to be there to make our lives comfortable and that our performance will determine His ability to do so.

Instead, we should be listening to Jesus. On their way back down the mountain, Jesus tells them again not to tell anyone until after His resurrection.

[ 16 : 35 ] And again, we've seen this motif a couple times, this theme in Mark a couple times, right? And again, the disciples are confused. And this time they ask Him about Elijah. Isn't Elijah supposed to come and restore all things?

How can we be talking about crosses and suffering, Jesus? I thought Elijah was supposed to come and restore all things and then the day of the Lord would happen and the Messiah would show up and it would be peace and glory forevermore. And you know, that's not a silly question they're asking because at the end of the Old Testament in Malachi chapter 4, verses 5 and 6, literally the last verses of our English Old Testament, Malachi writes that Elijah will return before the great and awesome day of the Lord.

But you see, Jesus helps them understand more properly what Malachi was saying and what's actually happening.

Because did you notice Jesus says, Elijah has come and they did to him whatever they wanted. And of course, he's referencing there John the Baptist because for Jesus, John the Baptist has fulfilled Malachi's prophecy about Elijah.

John the Baptist got everything ready for the day of the Lord. But what the scribes and even the disciples here failed to see is that the Old Testament also says that the Son of Man will be treated with contempt.

[ 17 : 55 ] Jesus probably has in mind Isaiah 53 where the suffering servant of the Lord, do you remember that passage, is bruised and crushed for the sins of his people. So you see, even after the transfiguration, the disciples are still having a hard time seeing what Jesus wants them to see.

But Jesus is adamant again and again and again that the way of the kingdom is the way of the cross. And then they're sort of making their way back down the mountain and finally they get to the bottom.

And again, we see all this reinforced another time. There's a crowd and some scribes and there's an argument going on between the scribes and Jesus' disciples. And Jesus enters into the crowd and gets involved, which is an interesting point, isn't it?

He doesn't stay far off on the mountain, basking in glory. Christ comes down and gets into the mess of our broken and sinful lives. And the disciples too aren't allowed to stay on the mountaintop.

They too are brought back down into the gritty realities of life. And all this is what Jesus has been telling them, that it's not a triumphant march to the throne, but it's the self-sacrificing way of the cross.

[ 19 : 04 ] And you know, now it seems at this point in the narrative that things have gotten even harder for the disciples. You remember back in chapter 6, Jesus gave the disciples the authority to cast out demons as they went around preaching and were given every reason to think that they

were actually able to do so.

They don't come back saying, Jesus, what happened? You gave us that authority and it didn't work. No, in fact, in Luke's gospel, they come back saying, we did it. But what happens here?

They aren't able to do it. They're inadequate. They fall short. You see, as they progress in their time with Jesus, the battle isn't getting easier.

It seems that it's getting harder. The scribes are getting more combative and the crowds are getting more hard-hearted, as Jesus says in verse 19. And the forces of evil are getting more entrenched and more immovable.

And you see, that is often the way that the Lord will lead us. He shows us more of himself to prepare us for the greater challenges ahead. Didn't Peter want to stay on the mountain, build some tents, and leave all this messy business of sin and redemption down below?

[ 20 : 16 ] Let's just stay up here, Jesus. We'll build some tents. We'll start a tourism thing. You know, we'll get some people to come up the mountain, pay a few denarii or whatever to check out Moses and Elijah and you because you're blazing white.

We'll make a little money. We won't have to get mixed up in the sticky, sinful realities of life. How often do we want our spiritual lives to be like that?

Let's just stay away from the mess and the sort of experience up here on the mountaintop. But you see, the whole reason Jesus took them up there was so that they could get back on the road because he knew it was going to get harder and he wanted them to be prepared.

And you see, if the transfiguration was meant to drive home the point that we must listen to Jesus above all else, then here at the bottom of the mountain, we're taught a lesson in what it means to trust Jesus in spite of all else.

When the father of the demon-possessed boy says, if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. You can almost hear the resignation in his voice, can't you? If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.

[ 21 : 34 ] You might be able to, Jesus. If you can. I hope you will. And then what does Jesus do? He challenges this man.

And how does he challenge them? He says, if you can, all things are possible for the one who believes. And with that question, it's not really a question, but with that remark, isn't Jesus forcing this man to reckon with his unbelief, to stare it straight in the face and to be honest?

And at the same time, Jesus is drawing this man into a relationship. If you can. Aren't all things possible for the one who believes?

And then the father utters one of the most honest prayers I think we can ever pray. He says, I believe. Help my unbelief. So what does it mean?

To listen to Jesus. To trust him. To believe in him. It doesn't mean that we don't have doubts. And it doesn't mean that we don't have questions. And it doesn't mean that we have to be 100% completely certain.

[ 22 : 50 ] No. It means committing yourself to him. Even with your doubts and your questions. Because then what happens?

The father has just admitted that his belief is loaded with all sorts of doubts and questions. It's like a piece of steak that's just run through with all sorts of fat and sinews and all sorts of stuff you really don't want in your meat.

There I am Jesus. I believe. Help my unbelief. And how does Jesus respond? Is he offended by the man's less than certain faith? Did you see what I just did up on that mountain?

Come on. You believe? Help my unbelief. No. No. Jesus receives the man and heals his son. It wasn't utter certainty that Jesus was looking for.

And by all means it wasn't the sort of level of this man's faith that caused his son to be healed. What Jesus was looking for was just honesty and a commitment to him.

[ 23 : 55 ] even in the face of doubts. You see, truly trusting in Jesus, true faith, is a certain kind of helplessness.

If the kind of faith Jesus required, think about it, was absolute certainty, if that's what Jesus was looking for, then wouldn't we come to him full of self-confidence, confident that we had it all figured out?

If that's what Jesus wanted was 100% absolute certainty, and if I actually had that, it wouldn't be helplessness with which I came. Instead, what Jesus wants us to do is to come with the helpless

cry captured so well by this Father.

Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief. And at the end of the section, the lesson is similar for the disciples, isn't it?

You can only drive out this kind by prayer, Jesus says to them. And what is prayer after all? Isn't prayer the acknowledgement that we can't do it ourselves?

[ 24 : 59 ] Isn't prayer an act speaking of our own insufficiency and inadequacy that we can't do it. That's why we pray. But we pray to a God who is sufficient and who is adequate and who is able.

And this is what Jesus is trying to tell us. This is why we have to listen to him. Because you see, every other religion and every other voice that you will listen to, it will give you lots of advice on how to give up your self-gratification and even your self-determination for a greater good.

Every other religion, every other parent, every other peer, every other hero will give you lots of advice on what pleasures to give up, on what rules to follow, on what paths to pursue, and what principles to adopt in order for you to make it in the end.

But you see, Jesus is completely different. The ultimate cross that we must take up is not merely abandoning our self-gratification, doing things for our own pleasure, and giving up our self-determination, being our own Lord.

But ultimately, Jesus says, here's what you put on the cross. Your self-justification. Your attempts to try to save yourself.

[ 26 : 20 ] And that's how you know you've finally crossed over to real faith in Christ. Not when you have all your answers, all your questions answered, not when you have all your doubts resolved, but when you've stopped trusting in your own works and efforts, when you've stopped trusting in your own worth to be accepted by God, and when you've stopped trusting even in the own quantity and quality of your faith, and you've just come to Jesus with honest and empty hands, and said, Lord, I believe.

Help my unbelief. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, tonight we want to acknowledge you as the one who is completely and fully divine.

in this passage you show us just a glimpse of your supreme glory. Lord, as Peter will later write, he'll say that on the mountain they beheld your majesty.

Lord, thank you for revealing your majesty to us in the words of this gospel. and Lord, we pray that we would listen to you above and over all the other voices that vie for our attention and for our heart's allegiance.

Lord, help us to listen to you in the words of the scripture. Lord, where you speak to us clearly and powerfully.

[ 28 : 02 ] and Lord, for all of us here tonight, help us to come to you in genuine faith. Lord, not a faith that is anxious about how pure and how sound it is, but Lord, that deep helplessness that acknowledges, Lord, that in our sin we are lost, but in you we find grace and peace.

God, if any of my friends here tonight are struggling to believe in you, Lord, by your spirit would you grant them the gift of faith. Open their eyes, Lord, to see their own helplessness but your own Jesus' glory and sufficiency.

Lord, thank you that you do this for your namesake. Amen. Thanks for coming tonight. In the back there's some coffee and some snacks. Feel free to stick around as long as you'd like to talk and just catch up.

It's not like you got anything else going on tonight, right? That was a Super Bowl joke. That was my one Super Bowl joke of the night. Come on. Give me that one. Hey, this week, get a bulletin on the way out.

Lots of small groups happening midweek, kind of kicking back in now that the spring is, or now that we're sort of into the new year. Most of the groups are up and running full-fledged. So if you're looking for some midweek fellowship and Bible study, connect with a small group.

[ 29 : 29 ] Let's end with the doxology from the book of Jude. Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time and now and forever.

Amen.