

Down from the Mountaintop

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[0 : 00] As we mentioned last time, the first two sections of Mark 9 are closely linked.

! We'll look at Mark 9, verses 9-13 tonight, but let's read Mark 9, verses 1-13 to set the context. Starting with Mark 9, verse 1, it says, And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus.

And Peter said to Jesus, Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah. For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, This is my beloved Son, listen to him. And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only. Starting with verse 9 now, this is the new material that we will cover tonight. And as they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

[1 : 39] 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.

Here's the main idea for tonight's passage. Listen to Jesus' own words to his followers.

These verses are John chapter 15, verses 18 through 21. And in John 15, 18 through 21, Jesus said, If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, A servant is not greater than his master.

[3 : 13] If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

For those of us living in the here and now, the reality that we should expect suffering in this world can be discouraging. Many of you already have experienced suffering for the name of Christ, and some of you probably are suffering now.

Coming off the high of witnessing the transfiguration, the trip down from the mountaintop will be discouraging for the disciples who had just seen Jesus' glory. For us, coming down from the mountaintop of our salvation can be discouraging as we settle into the sometimes difficult day-to-day life of following Christ.

The remedy for that discouragement is the same for us as it was for the disciples, and that is, listen to the word of God. Tonight's verses are discouraging if we look at them by themselves, but in the greater scheme of things, these verses show us that everything is proceeding according to God's plan.

Like Jesus, believers will experience suffering before experiencing glory. As we set the scene for tonight's passage, this is another time when we need to put ourselves in the sandals of Peter, James, and John.

[4 : 41] There was no place in their thinking for a dying and rising Messiah. They believed what the scribes had taught the people and what the people believed. Messiah, in their view, would come to conquer and judge his enemies, bring salvation to the Jewish people, and elevate Israel to world supremacy.

After destroying all the enemies of Israel and God, they expected that the Messiah would establish his earthly kingdom of righteousness, peace, and knowledge. He would be worshipped, pour out divine blessings on the world, and crush any appearance of evil.

When the disciples heard Jesus repeatedly say that he was going to suffer, be arrested, be mistreated, be killed, and then rise again, they could not accept that.

It was a stumbling block for them. It was a frightening and also a profoundly disturbing thought.

Things were not going according to their messianic expectations and anticipations.

The Jewish leaders, who were presumably the best qualified to recognize the Messiah, had rejected Jesus, and they were seeking to kill him. The people, though curious about him, were largely unconvinced and unconverted, and one of Jesus' own followers asked, Lord, will those who are saved be few?

[6 : 05] That comes from Luke chapter 13, verse 23. Many superficial followers were abandoning Jesus, unwilling to deny themselves, unwilling to suffer for the sake of his name, and unwilling to obey him completely.

The transfiguration helped mitigate the disciples' shock and disappointment at the prospect of the Lord's death by giving three of them a preview of Jesus' coming glory.

The three disciples have learned that despite his earthly outward appearance, Jesus is God. The transfiguration has proven that beyond any reasonable question.

But they might be thinking now, how might the transfiguration mean Jesus could triumph without the cross? Could he possibly enter into his glory and establish his kingdom in power now, giving the breathtaking display that they had just witnessed?

So they might be thinking, who says that the cross must come before the crown? And of course, we know the answer to that question. Jesus is the one who says that the cross must come before the crown.

[7 : 13] What Jesus has just experienced has not weakened his resolve to go to Calvary. It has emboldened him to go and drink the last drop of the cup of divine wrath in the place of unworthy and helpless sinners.

The time had come for all four of them to come down from the mountaintop. So we'll study tonight's passage in three sections, beginning with just verse 9.

And in verse 9, we see the command. So the command is the first thing that we'll look at. Here is verse 9 again.

And as they were coming down the mountain, he, that's Jesus, charged them to tell no one what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

So as they were coming down, the three disciples were trying to process the meaning of the majestic yet terrifying scene that they had just witnessed. Speechless at first, they were still overcome with wonder and awe, not totally unlike Moses, whose face shone after seeing God's glory.

[8 : 20] Their faith in Jesus had been confirmed by what they had seen and heard and had convinced them that he was the Messiah and also the Son of God. Never again would they be shaken in their confidence as to Jesus' identity.

The three disciples' faith would be tested by what happened to Jesus at his arrest, his trial, his death, and the disciples would temporarily abandon and deny him.

But no threat, disappointment, humiliation, dishonor, or suffering on Jesus' part or theirs would make them doubt that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God.

Certainly, the disciples' first inclination would have been to tell everyone what they had just witnessed. The other disciples would have been encouraged to hear about it too. But Jesus gives what seems to be a surprising command.

He tells them to tell no one what they had seen. Throughout Mark's Gospel so far, we've often seen Jesus command people to tell nobody about what they had seen him do.

[9 : 27] If you're keeping track, this is actually the ninth time that Jesus has issued a command for silence. This time, though, is different from the first eight times in two ways.

This time is different because it is the final time that Jesus will issue such a command in Mark. And this time is different because it is the only time that Jesus puts a time limit on the silence.

Jesus says to tell no one what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. The time limit, then, implied a time of proclamation would follow this period of silence.

Only from the perspective of the resurrection would they understand the transfiguration and be able to proclaim its meaning correctly. John MacArthur said, The central truth of the Gospel is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The central truth is not that Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, or manifested divine glory. Publicizing those things might have diverted the people's attention from his coming suffering and fanned the flames of messianic expectation.

[10:40] After the Son of Man rose from the dead, it would be obvious that he had come to die and thus conquer sin and death and not the Romans. The disciples' response to this command for silence also is different than the responses we saw following the other eight times that Jesus made such a command.

The other eight times that Jesus demanded silence, the people he commanded to be silent blabbed at everybody that they saw. Verse 10 will tell us that this time the disciples obeyed Jesus' command.

But can you imagine how hard it must have been for the disciples to tell no one what they had seen? Well, before we leave this section, we need to notice something else about the wording in Jesus' command for silence.

Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man. The Son of Man title appeared only twice in the first half of Mark. Both of those were back in chapter 2, in chapter 2, verse 10, and chapter 2, verse 28.

But now that title is going to occur with great regularity, especially in the context of Jesus' suffering. And the title refers to the heavenly man that's referenced in Daniel chapter 7, verses 13 and 14.

[12:03] In Daniel chapter 7, verses 13 and 14, Daniel wrote about an interaction he saw between God and Jesus. So here are Daniel chapter 7, verses 13 and 14.

Daniel said, But I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the cloud of heavens there came one like a son of man. And he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.

And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

In the introduction, we talked about how the remedy for discouragement is to listen to the word of God. That applies to both us and the disciples.

In verse 9, before the disciples ask any questions, Jesus already is pointing them back to Scripture by using the Son of Man title. As we move to the second section of tonight's passage, we'll see that the disciples have returned to form.

[13:17] They cannot understand the significance of what they've just witnessed and what they've just heard Jesus say. Mark gives us details about the confusion. So the confusion is the second thing that we'll look at.

Mark chapter 9, verses 10 and 11 say, So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean. And they ask him, why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?

We see from verse 10 that the disciples were puzzled by Jesus telling them that he would rise from the dead. So let's consider why they would have been confused about that.

They knew what a resurrection was. They had seen Jesus raise people from the dead. And they'd even resurrected people themselves. The disciples also understood from the Old Testament that there would be a general resurrection.

They were not having a discussion about the nature of resurrection in general, but about the resurrection of Jesus in particular. They were confused about his death and rising.

[14:28] Those events did not fit into their view of the Messiah's mission. Trying to understand those events became the subject of their thinking and the topic of their conversation.

The disciples believed that the death and resurrection that Jesus mentioned would happen soon, certainly in their lifetime. They believed that because Jesus told them that they would be allowed to speak of those events after they took place.

The disciples were trying to fit the death and resurrection of Jesus into their belief that the kingdom was imminent, while they continued to believe even after those events took place.

At some point during the 40 days between Christ's resurrection and ascension, a time he spent speaking to them of the things concerning the kingdom of God, the disciples eagerly asked him, Lord, is it at this time you're restoring the kingdom of Israel?

Their question, though misguided, was understandable. We can understand why Jesus' comment about rising from the dead could have been confusing, but the meaning should have been obvious for several reasons.

[15:39] First, Jesus already had told them that he would suffer, die, and rise again. We saw that in Mark 8, verse 31, and the first part of Mark 8, verse 32, told us that Jesus clearly told them those things.

Here are Mark 8, verse 31, and the first part of Mark 8, verse 32. It says, A second reason why the meaning of rising from the dead should have been obvious is the natural sequence of things.

What's the only way that someone can rise from the dead? Well, rising from the dead can only happen if you're dead. It's a package deal.

They go together. Death and resurrection are a pair. You can't have resurrection without the other. So we're back to what Jesus said in Mark 8, verse 31.

He must suffer and be killed, and after three days, rise again. Jesus' carefully chosen words are reinforcing what he said earlier, but the disciples still fail to understand what he's telling them.

[17:12] A third reason why the meaning of rising from the dead should have been obvious is that the Old Testament scriptures predicted it. For one example, consider Isaiah 53.

Listen to what Isaiah 53, verses 3 through 11, prophesy about the Messiah. Again, these verses are Isaiah 53, verses 3 through 11.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, spented by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities.

Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[18:27] For he was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away, and asked for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people.

And they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him, he has put him to grief.

When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days. The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul, he shall see and be satisfied.

By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. The sermon player on the church website has in-depth studies of Isaiah 53.

[19:39] Suffice it to say for now that verses 7 through 10 show that the Messiah will be killed, yet verse 10 also says that the Messiah will see his offspring. The only way a previously dead person can see his offspring is if that person rises from the dead.

Going all the way back to Genesis, God had been signaling to his people that God himself would provide a sacrifice to atone for people's sins. Genesis 3, verses 14 and 15 document what God said to the serpent after the serpent deceived Eve.

Here are Genesis 3, verses 14 and 15. The Lord God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field.

On your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. Later in Genesis, God began to more clearly show that he would be the one to provide the sacrifice necessary for sin.

[21:00] Genesis chapter 22, verses 6 through 8 take place after God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. So let's look at Genesis chapter 22, verses 6 through 8.

Those verses say, And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife.

So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, My father. And he said, Here I am, my son. He said, Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

Abraham said, God will provide for himself a lamb for a burnt offering, my son. So they went, both of them together. Abraham's words in Genesis 22, 8 should be burned into every believer's mind.

That's again where Abraham said, God will provide for himself the lamb. We like the time to look at more Old Testament cross-references about the Messiah's suffering tonight, but others are Psalm 16, Psalm 22, Psalm 110, and also Zechariah chapter 13.

[22 : 23] Moving to the New Testament, the dots began to connect even more when Jesus came to earth. Remember what John the Baptist said about Jesus early in Jesus' ministry.

Here are John chapter 1, verses 29 through 31, and they are talking about John the Baptist. And John 1, verses 29 through 31 say, The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This is he of whom I said, After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me. I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water that he might be revealed to Israel.

Back in our Mark text, we see that although the disciples were slow learners, they did occasionally learn something. At the end of Mark chapter 8, Jesus referred to Peter as Satan when Peter rebuked Jesus for saying that he, Jesus, would die.

During the Transfiguration, Peter got rebuked again, this time by God the Father, when Peter interrupted Jesus, Moses, and Elijah while those three were talking about Jesus' death.

[23 : 47] The disciples have yet to understand what Jesus meant by his death and resurrection, but they have learned to avoid asking questions about that subject for now, and instead they have a different question for Jesus.

Look at Mark chapter 9, verse 11 again. It says, And they ask him, Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?

Their question was a good one, and it was based on an accurate understanding of the Old Testament. Listen to Malachi chapter 3, verse 1. Malachi chapter 3, verse 1 says, Malachi ends then with a prophecy that includes the coming of Elijah.

Here are Malachi chapter 4, verses 5 and 6. And in Malachi chapter 4, verses 5 and 6, God said, Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes, and he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

The disciples might have thought that the sudden appearance of Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration was a fulfillment of that prophecy. If so, it wouldn't have been a very satisfactory one because, in that case, the Lord would have appeared before his appointed herald.

[25 : 35] The disciples were perplexed, as many people are, over the specific details of Bible prophecy, especially over the chronological sequence of events.

The disciples might have been thinking, We know that Elijah will return before the great day of the Lord when God is going to put everything right, but we just saw Elijah up there.

So, isn't the day of the Lord near? They might have also been thinking, Why are we talking about all this death and resurrection stuff still? Let us talk about the restoration of all things instead.

They're trying to change the subject here, but Jesus is going to take them right back to that same subject. The disciples have a partial blindness. They only know half of the story.

They've missed the suffering part of the picture once again. Once again, Jesus is going to help them connect the dots of Scripture, and He will show that the disciples' question about Elijah is not a separate subject from His own death and resurrection.

[26 : 40] We'll see Jesus help the disciples connect those dots in the last section of our Scripture for tonight. So far, we've seen the command and the confusion. In the last two verses of tonight's passage, Jesus gives the disciples the clarification.

So the clarification is the last thing we'll see. Listen to Mark 9, verses 12 and 13 again.

And Jesus 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. Jesus makes a surprising connection here.

It's a connection that they didn't see coming. The same divine Scriptures that predicted the coming of Elijah prior to the day of the Lord also predicted a suffering Messiah.

[27 : 45] How could they miss Psalm 16, Psalm 22, Psalm 110, and Isaiah 52-53? If you read the whole of the Old Testament in light of Genesis 3, verse 15, all of it unfolds from there.

It unfolds by telling us that the Son of Man will suffer, be treated with contempt, be killed, and then rise from the dead. Jesus made two facts clear here.

First, for those who had trusted in him, this Elijah was John the Baptist because John had indeed prepared the way before Jesus. John had denied that he was Elijah come from the dead, but he did minister in the spirit and power of Elijah, as Luke puts it in Luke chapter 1, verses 16 and 17.

Second, there would be a future coming of Elijah just as Malachi had predicted, and this would be before the time of great tribulation. Some people connect this with Revelation chapter 11, verse 3. God says in Revelation chapter 11, verse 3, Elijah is widely considered to be one of those two witnesses in Revelation.

[29 : 18] And here's what J.C. Ryle said. He said, I believe that a literal appearing of Elijah the prophet before the second coming of Christ may be expected.

Dark and incomprehensible as the subject is, the scriptural arguments in favor of this view appear to me unanswerable. Any other view seems to do violence to the plain meaning of the words of Malachi chapter 4, verses 5 and 6, Matthew chapter 17, verse 11, and John chapter 1, verse 21. There seems no reason why there should not be a double coming of Elijah, the first in spirit and power when John the Baptist preached, and the second literal and in person when he comes at the end of the world immediately before the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

Matthew's account of the events in our passage tonight supports Ryle opinion. Matthew 17, verse 10, opens with the same question that we saw in Mark chapter 9, verse 11.

So here are Matthew chapter 17, verses 10 through 13. And the disciples ask him, then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?

[30 : 41] Jesus answered, Elijah does come and he will restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they pleased.

So also, the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist. John the Baptist experienced ruthless, arbitrary suffering and death at the hands of Herod Antipas and Herodias.

Elijah suffered persecution at the hands of Ahab and Jezebel. And what these antagonists did to Elijah and John, people hostile to God, would do to Jesus.

The biblical pattern is clear. Elijah was rejected and persecuted. Messiah's forerunner who came in the spirit and power of Elijah was rejected and killed.

the Messiah himself was rejected and murdered. In the future, however, the prophesied Elijah will come, the Lord Jesus Christ will return and the kingdom will be established.

[31 : 55] But we see again that the cross must come before the crown. Jesus was telling his disciples that just as John the Baptist was rejected and ultimately killed, he too must be rejected and killed as the prophets foretold.

So here then was another reminder that the glorious Lord the disciples had seen on the mountain was about to undergo great agony and distress. Before exaltation, there would be deep humiliation. Jesus is pointing to another general pattern in Scripture of the persecution and suffering of the prophets. Later in Mark chapter 12, he will highlight this by portraying Israel as tenants of a vineyard who keep rejecting and even killing the messengers of the owner.

At last, the master sends his beloved son. The master says, they will respect my son. But when we get to Mark chapter 12, we will see that they kill the son too.

Because we have completed Scripture, we know what the disciples failed to fully understand when the events in our passage tonight first took place. Jesus came to earth to suffer and die to pay the penalty for all believers' sins.

[33 : 13] By dying on the cross for all believers' sins, Jesus absorbed the wrath of God for every believer. For believers, the Bible is clear that suffering will come before glory, but that glory will come after this life ends.

For people who have yet to repent of their sins and trust in Christ for salvation, what comes after this life will be much worse than anything they could have imagined. We must be willing to share the good news and the bad news.

The bad news is that everyone has sinned and deserves the wrath of God. The good news is that God has provided the sacrificial lamb to pay sin's penalty.

Jesus willingly paid that penalty for everyone who puts their faith in Him alone for salvation. The British preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones said, The Son of God became man that the children of men might become children of God.

Jesus Christ is the hero of the Bible. He's God in a body, the Savior of sinners, the final sacrifice, and the glory of God made flesh.

[34 : 26] He took three disciples up a mountain for a glimpse of glory, and He wants to take you and me up to heaven to glory forever. So the question for all of us is, will you follow Him?

Also, will you trust Him? You become what you behold. May we all behold Jesus now and forever. Remember the main idea.

Like Jesus, believers will experience suffering before experiencing glory. Daniel Achan had this message for believers. He said, John fulfilled the assignment given to him by God, and so would our Lord.

God would faithfully see them through their suffering in greatest hours of trial. Might we not be able to trust Him to do the same for us? Achan's words are good, but the Bible's words are even better. Here are just two examples of that. These verses are 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verses 17 and 18. Paul said in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verses 17 and 18, For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen.

[35 : 52] For the things that are seen are transient, that the things that are unseen are eternal. Peter, one of the central characters in the first 13 verses of Mark chapter 9, expressed a similar thought.

Listen to what Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1 verses 3 through 9. 1 Peter 1 verses 3 through 9 say, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this, you rejoice, though now for a little vault if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

[37 : 24] Let's pray. Father, thank you for this reminder that for Christians, we can't expect suffering in this world.

We shouldn't expect to have things any better than the one we claim to follow. As we go through suffering and difficulties for the sake of Christ, help us remember His example and help us become more and more like Christ.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen. Amen. I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm