

Jason Upchurch - Mark 9:1-13 - The Good News of Our Powerful King and His Powerful Kingdom

We return this morning to the Transfiguration of Jesus. Last time we just barely touched on this passage because I wanted to encourage our hearts that the hope of the gospel - the greatest hope - is that this small vision the disciples get is the hope of every Christian: that we will spend all eternity gazing at the beauty and glory of the Lord Jesus face to face as a friend.

That should comfort you and encourage you. One day this life of sorrow and difficulty and decay and sin will be gone. And there will only be joy and gladness and peace forevermore because we will be in the presence of Jesus.

Nevertheless, I want to dive a little deeper with you through this passage because this really is an amazing passage that gives us 3 truths that we hold dearly.

1) That the Kingdom of God has come in power. **Read 1**

Now, the most difficult part of this passage is actually the very first verse. Verse 1 presents some challenges and a lot of trees have been chopped down in the name of trying to figure it out.

Here's the question: When exactly did the Kingdom come in power? He says some of the disciples will not taste death before they see that the Kingdom has come in power. Exactly what did they see that confirmed the Kingdom had come in power? There's a lot of options.

Now, I'll talk about that. But before we get too far into the weeds here, let me just say that whatever the answer is we can be assured that the Kingdom has in fact come in power.

So take a look. **Read 1**

So Jesus says "truly I say to you" - this is a certainty. Any time Jesus says "truly I say to you" this is basically him saying "you can take this to the bank."

What is certain? That there are some people who are standing there - in the crowd and disciples - who won't die until after the Kingdom has come in power.

Now, two quick notes. First, some people think this is referring to the second coming of Jesus. That he will come in power. There's a view called full preterism that says there is no second coming of Jesus. There's just Jesus coming in power and that this has already happened. Full preterism is heresy - it denies the second coming of Jesus. Jesus is not predicting his second coming here at all.

Second, Jesus says these people will be alive after the Kingdom has come in power. **Read 1**

There's a really important word in that sentence: after. There are some alive who will not die until after the Kingdom has already come in power. So there are some in the crowd who will be alive long enough to look back and realize He's predicting a point at which the Kingdom of God will be so obvious that they can point to a moment when it came with power.

Now, the \$64,000 question is: what is that point. We know it's happened because that generation has died off. But what is the exact point to which Jesus is referring?

Well, we don't know for 100% sure. There are several options. Is it the Transfiguration that follows? Death of Jesus or resurrection of Jesus? His Ascension or the pouring out of the Spirit? Is it the destruction of Jerusalem? Or some other secret option?

The most common answer people give is the Transfiguration. Most people would say that the transfiguration is the event that some of these people would look back on and say "That's when the Kingdom came in power." Why? Well, in all the gospel accounts the transfiguration comes right after this saying and the 3 disciples do see Jesus in power and glory. Also there's a direct link between verses 1 and 2. **Read 1-2**

So the most common case is that the Kingdom coming in power is at the Transfiguration.

I don't hold that view. My biggest problem with that is it's a little odd to say "There are some standing here who won't die until...next week." I get that the disciples see the glory and power of Jesus. But nothing massive happens in terms of the ministry or the Kingdom after this point. And actually, when Peter reflects back on this event in his epistle, he downplays the significance of the Transfiguration. **Look at 2 Pet. 1:16-21.**

This is Peter talking about how the Bible is given to us by God. And the Bible is more significant than experience we will ever have. In fact, the experience Peter relates is the Transfiguration. That was an amazing experience. But Peter says: what's more sure than even the experience of seeing Jesus in glory is the Word we hold in our hand. **Read 16-21**

Peter says, "We saw his glory and majesty, we heard the voice from heaven...but you know what? We have something more sure and confirmed than that experience. We have prophetic word - the Word of God - that came from the Holy Spirit." Experiences are good if they're true. But the one thing we always know is true is the Bible. What Peter calls the prophetic word.

So this is the only commentary we have in the NT about that event and it doesn't even mention the Kingdom or power. The point is actually that the Word we have is powerful. That seems very unusual if this was a major turning point in the Kingdom of God.

Back in **Mark 9** another option is that it refers to the death or resurrection of Jesus or possibly both together.

According to **Rom. 1** Jesus was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the resurrection from the dead. And that event was a little farther away - it seems likely in the massive crowd some might have died in the intervening time. And obviously the death and resurrection of the Lord are the pinnacle of the Christian faith.

If I were to make a guess I'd say Jesus is probably talking about Pentecost. Pentecost is when the Bible refers over and over to when power is poured out on the people of God. It's when Jesus says the disciples would receive power when the Holy Spirit comes (**Acts 1:8**).

In Acts Jesus says wait in the room until the Holy Spirit comes with power. When the disciples are preaching and doing miracles and the masses are coming to faith in Jesus **Acts 4:33** says "And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."

Pentecost is also the point where every believer is filled with the Spirit. This is unprecedented in salvation history because now the people of God are fully gifted with divine power to serve one another in the church.

I'm not going to die on this hill. My runner up is that it's talking about 70AD when Jerusalem was absolutely destroyed. Why? Because that was the judgment of God on the godless Jewish religious system that rejected Jesus. And the language of Jesus suggests that not many people would be around to experience the Kingdom of God in power would indicate some years later. There wouldn't be many believers in that crowd still around in 70AD. Some, but not many. In fact many of the apostles died before seeing that event.

Now, I know you stay up at night tossing and turning about which event this is. Let me console your conscience that whatever it is has taken place and the Kingdom has come with power and some of those people saw it.

Let me just say by way of application that when we gather together as the church, the blood-bought Spirit-filled church of Jesus Christ there is a divine power here that we can't quite understand.

Maybe you don't feel like you walk away "charged" or filled with power. But sometimes I think that's because we're so used to the means of grace we don't always understand how they affect us. But it only takes a little

bit of time away from the Spirit-filled people of God for us to realize something is missing. And what's missing is the fellowship of people filled with the Spirit of God enjoying the graces of God through corporate worship.

I remember listening to a guy on the phone telling a friend that the friend needed to read his Bible more. And I didn't hear the response, but it was some kind of objection that he didn't understand all he read. And the guy's illustration was great. He said "When you eat a banana you don't always feel the effects of the vitamins and nutrients, but you need them don't you?" And the answer is yes. We need the effects of fellowship and the means of grace whether we feel them or not.

When the church gathers together around the Word, to encourage and love and fellowship and learn and sing and take the Supper - there is a powerful working of the Spirit whether we know it or not.

The Kingdom of God has come in power, and we experience that power even now.

2) Jesus is fully God. **Read 2-3**

Alright so when we think of a mountain, and God's glory, and a cloud, and God speaking on the mountain, what event are usually thinking of? Mt Sinai. What is happening here is God intentionally making a parallel to Mt Sinai in revealing who his Son Jesus is.

The Bible repeats itself on purpose to help us see the story line. Remember when Israel had been brought out of Egypt - 10 plagues, the Red Sea crossing - they went to Mt. Sinai. And there God revealed himself to Moses and Aaron and the elders. This is intentional casting of Jesus on the Mountain.

Now, Jesus has recreated the Exodus event in the past. Walking around water - and over water - with the masses of Israelites, feeding them in the wilderness just like Moses.

But here Jesus is not taking the role of Moses, is he? Moses is actually present with them. What role is Jesus taking here? He's God. Fully God. Now, obviously he's always been fully God but he is now showing that to his disciples by unveiling his glory just as Moses saw the unveiled glory of God on Sinai.

So this is Sinai 2.0 and Jesus is the one in glory. And Mark is at his end in trying to describe what we're seeing here. **Read 3**

Transfigured is metamorphoo where we get the word metamorphosis. It's changing the condition of one's place.

It's used a couple of times of believers as we are sanctified and become more and more holy. We look less and less like our old self and more and more like Jesus. Our manner of life more reflects the radical work of the Spirit in us.

Well here Jesus is changed completely to reflect the glory he has in his divine nature. Now Mark only mentions his clothes. They are bleached white and radiant like no one on earth could bleach them. They are radiantly bright clothes. Luke says dazzling white. They have their own internal brightness and glory. Jesus isn't reflecting glory - Jesus is the glory and his clothes exude the glory.

Mark, interestingly, doesn't comment on Jesus face but both Matthew and Luke do. Matthew says his face shone as the sun. Blinding, white hot glory on the mountain.

Now, speaking of mountains, we don't know what mountain this was. Jesus and his crew were just at Caesarea Philippi way up north. This could be Mt. Hermon - the tallest mountain in the area. Most people believe this was Mt Tabor, a much smaller mountain - we'd call it a hill - but it stands impressively above the surrounding valley and on top of Mt. Tabor is a church called the Church of the Transfiguration. This is a place most Christians have identified as the spot for millennia.

The reality is we don't know exactly where this happened. And the gospels are oddly silent about the location. But that's probably because they want to focus on the reality of what happened there.

Now, why Elijah and Moses? What's up with that? Well, it could be that they represent the Law and the Prophets. The Jews in Jesus's day didn't call it the "Old Testament" they called it "the Law and the Prophets." Moses was the principle Law giver and Elijah one of the most famous prophets.

More likely it's that both men went to Mt. Sinai, both men had amazing encounters with God, and most importantly both men specifically looked forward to the Messiah.

That last one I think is the most important. Look once more, really quickly at **Vs. 7. Read**

Listen to the beloved son. **Look back at Deut 18:15-19** for a moment. This is where God not only warns against false teachers and sorcerers but also promises to raise up someone like Moses to lead his people. **Read 15**

Now, just stop there for a minute. What's the connection? Listen to this prophet. That's exactly what the Father said to the disciples on the mountain. He's connecting the dots very clearly. **Read 15-16**

Now there's a connection between this coming prophet, listening and a mountain. **Read 17-19**

So God is making it clear on the mountain that there will come another one the people of God are to listen to. And if they don't listen to him, God will judge them.

Now, go to **Mal. 4** for a minute. Here is the close of the OT and there's a particular person that's mentioned. Not Moses, but? Elijah. **Read 1-6**

So there's coming a day of judgment from the Lord. The only ones who will escape that judgement, according to **Vs. 2** are those who fear the name of the Lord. The people who fear the Lord will rejoice at the coming judgement.

But there will be a person who is sent before that day. And it's Elijah the prophet. Interestingly, Malachi also mentions Moses and Mt. Horeb, which is another name for Mt. Sinai. All these themes are winding together.

This is the last word from God in the OT. Malachi prophecies in maybe 440BC and there's nothing from God at all for almost 500 years.

And then someone appears on the scene preaching. Who's that? John the Baptist. **Turn to Matt. 3:1-6.**

This is the first time we see a prophet pull up on the scene. This is around AD 30 - so 470 years after Malachi. And notice what John looks like. **Read 1-6**

John is dressed like Elijah. **1 Kings 1:8** says that Elijah wore a garment of hair and a belt of leather around his waist.

John is not Elijah, John is a type of Elijah. John is the indicator that Elijah is to come. **Turn back to Mark 9.**

I know that's a lot, but that's the background of why Moses and Elijah have appeared on this mountain with Jesus and Peter, James and John. It's that these 2 men specifically point to the reality of the Messiah - the Prophet, capital P - that would come in the last days. And the recreation of the whole event is the confirmation. **Read 4-8**

Now, there's a lot about this situation we don't know.

What are Jesus, Moses and Elijah talking about? We don't know.
How did they know it was Moses and Elijah? We don't know.
Why does Peter want to make 3 tents? We don't know.

What we do know is that this experience was overwhelming. Mark says they were terrified. Ekphobos - intensely afraid. It's actually the word used in Hebrews 12:21 to talk about the people of Israel at the base of Sinai when God met them after the Exodus.

And if the appearance of 2 dead OT heroes and the glory of Jesus aren't enough, God himself speaks from heaven. **Read 7**

Moses pointed to Jesus. Elijah looked forward to Jesus. The Father testifies to Jesus, his beloved, glorious divine Son. Listen to him.

Jesus isn't just the new Prophet, Jesus isn't just the winnowed and Judge. Jesus is God on the mountain.

Fully God revealed in radiant, dazzling glory. And just like that, it's over. Everything is gone and it's just Jesus and the other 3.

3) Jesus fulfills OT prophecy. **Read 9-13**

So what Mark does is help us connect some dots here that this whole thing helps confirm all that was written about Jesus and confirms all the prophecies in the OT.

Now, the disciples are confused. What just happened? They're terrified and awestruck and then Jesus drops more information on them again about his death and resurrection. They're trying to put it all together but it makes no sense. And then Jesus says to keep this silent.

Why keep this silent? For the same reason the other miracles were supposed to be kept silent: Jesus doesn't want people to misunderstand his mission as Messiah. If the disciples spread the rumor of Jesus's glory on the mountain Messianic fervor could have boiled over. "We're taking over the world now, baby! We've got God on our side. We're not taking the Promised Land, we're taking all the nations!"

Well, they wouldn't have been wrong about nations. They would have been wrong about what it means for Messiah to reign over the nations and conquer them. That Messiah reigns as God from heaven over all the nations and blesses those who turn to him.

Now, to the credit of these 3, it seems like they did keep it quiet, unlike so many of the people who were healed. They were likely awestruck but they didn't report this to the others before the resurrection.

Why wait? Because after the resurrection then the glory would make sense. Jesus died and then rose again. But the piece that will be confirmed for them is that he is divine, just like the OT promised.

So the disciples ask 1 question and Jesus gives 3 responses. And all 3 have to do with fulfilling OT prophecy. The questions is why do the the scribes say Elijah must come first?

Well, we read why, didn't we? **Malachi 4** - the very last words in the OT promise Elijah coming. It was John the Baptist. He restored all things. Not in the sense that everyone believed in Jesus but in the sense that he prepared the way for Jesus.

Second response: And how is it written that the Son of Man should suffer many things and be treated with contempt?

You think wrapping your head around Elijah is going to be tough, my crucifixion and resurrection are going to rock your world!

Psalms 22: My God, my God, why have you what? Forsaken me? They have pierced my hands and feet I can count all my bones...they divide my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots.

Psalms 118:22 Jesus is the stone that the builders rejected but has become the chief cornerstone.

Isaiah 53:3-6: He was despised and rejected by men...he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. He was pierced for what? Our transgressions.

They've just seen Jesus in glory and in power and Jesus is telling them he's going to suffer, be treated with contempt and then die. What? But it has to be for the Scripture to be fulfilled.

The third answer Jesus gives connects Elijah directly to John. **Read 13**

Matthew's gospel adds that the disciples understood at this point that Jesus was talking about John. It wasn't that Elijah personally was going to come. It was an Elijah-like person. **Luke 1:17** says he John had the spirit and power of Elijah. Just like Elijah transferred his power to Elisha, so too John will have this power to prepare people for the Messiah.

They'll understand that the glory wasn't a show trick. The glory proved that Jesus was the spotless, holy Lamb of God who had no sins of his own but could pay for the sins of others.

The glory on the mountain weaves the whole biblical narrative together. The Kingdom has come in power use like God said it would. And Jesus, the divine Messiah, has fulfilled the promises of God, just like he said he would.

And we get a taste of the glory to come. **Pray**