

September 21, 2025

A PICTURE OF GLORIOUS VINDICATION ON A PATH OF SUFFERING

Mark 9:2-13

(20 of 22 in a series through Mark 1-9)

In Exodus 33:16, Moses prayed, asking the Lord to show him his glory. Just prior to this, Moses had come down from the mountain to see Israel engaged in immorality and idol worship. They'd formed the golden calf and had the audacity to refer to this thing that they'd formed with their hands as the God who had delivered them from Egypt. And when the Lord said that he'd destroy these people, Moses began to intercede, asking the Lord to spare them and continue to allow his presence to be with them. But that's not all that Moses asked the Lord during that prayer of intercession. As I've noted, he then asked the Lord, "Show me your glory."

Now, when you think about it, that's an interesting request at that particular time. Perhaps we would think that this would be our request when we're overwhelmed at the steadfast love of the Lord, his faithfulness, and his goodness, and we then, as we are moved in our spirit, exclaim, "Lord, show me your glory." But that hadn't been the context in which Moses asked this. It wasn't an emotional outburst of praise. He'd just made an argument in prayer as to why it would not be good for the Lord to wipe from the face of the earth this stiff-necked people, and then he said, "Show me your glory." But I have a guess as to why this request came from Moses in this moment. If the Lord was going to grant Moses' request not to destroy this people who'd shown themselves to be so vile and unbelieving in so many ways, then Moses was going to have to continue to lead them. And if he was going to walk through this painful task of leading them, then he needed a glimpse of the glorious nature of the one who'd raised him up to do so. He needed a reminder—in the form of seeing God's glory—as to why it was all worth it.

I think that's in large measure why we see the events that take place the text we're looking at this morning—Mark 9:2-13. Now, I actually did have written down in my manuscript from last week some comments on Mark 9:1, but I simply forgot to say them. But I think it's okay because I can note it as we look at this text. As the text that we looked at last week ended, Jesus had first told the crowd and the twelve that if anyone was going to follow him, they'd need to take up their cross and follow him. That is, they'd have to treasure him more their own lives, being willing to give up their lives, if necessary, in order to demonstrate their faithful allegiance to him. Simply put, anyone valuing their lives more than they treasure Jesus is not worthy of being his follower.

Now, that is a weighty calling for us, as Christ's followers, just as it was the crowd that day. In fact, of the twelve whom Jesus had called to be his disciples, most of them would indeed give their lives in martyrdom because of their allegiance to Christ. Therefore, in light of this weighty calling that Jesus had laid out in front of them—like Moses' weighty task of leading the Israelites before them—Jesus proclaims at the beginning of this chapter that some of them wouldn't die until they saw "the kingdom of God after it has come with power" (9:1), which is to say, they would see God's promised and eternal king (Jesus) not just in his state of humiliation but in glory

and power. That's where our text begins this morning, and I want to walk through it under four headings, the first of which is: a picture of the vindication that awaited Christ and awaits us.

A picture of the vindication that awaited Christ and awaits us

Right after that promise of 9:1, Mark writes, "And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves" (v. 2). A few things here before we continue. First, Mark's note "and after six days" is very unusual for him. He says "immediately" all the time, but besides that he almost never gives temporal markers. But he does here. In fact, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all have Jesus' promise that some of his followers would see the kingdom in power followed by the event of the transfiguration, and all of them give a temporal marker that it was "after six days" (Matthew and Mark) or "about eight days after" (Luke). In other words, these authors are showing that this is the fulfillment of what Jesus had just pronounced. Second, we should anticipate some revelation of God because throughout the Bible God reveals himself on mountaintops, even as he had given the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. And that's exactly what we have.

Mark tells us that Jesus "was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them" (vv. 2-3). What had happened is that Jesus had been transformed in that moment to give these three a glimpse of the glory that he would have after his resurrection and at his second coming. Each of apostles would see that glory after his resurrection, but these three were seeing it now.

Now, why did Jesus show them this glimpse of his post-resurrection, second-coming glory? I think for the same reason Moses needed to see God's glory. After Jesus tells us a people that he'll suffer and die, and if they follow him, they'll need to take up their cross as well, they need to be reminded of the vindication that follows. Yes, Jesus would suffer and die, but he'd be raised in glory. And, yes, they would suffer and die, but they'd be vindicated as well. They, like Jesus, would suffer and die. And they, like Jesus, would be raised in glorified bodies. The Scripture tells us that Jesus was the first to be raised in glory, but he won't be the last. We will be as well. And so these three gets a glimpse of the glory that awaited Jesus after his resurrection and would await them after theirs. So, that's the first thing that's going on, I think. Jesus is giving them a glimpse of his glorious coming vindication, a vindication that they would one day share in as well at their resurrection. But this scene doesn't stop with Jesus' glorious appearance, we also see a call to listen to and obey Christ's words.

A call to listen to and obey Christ's words

As the scene on the mountain continues, things just get more and more impressive. After Jesus was transfigured in glory, Mark tells us that Elijah and Moses appeared with him, and they were talking to Jesus. Now, there's some debate about why these two figures. Some suggest that it's to represent the Old Testament Scripture, since a shorthand designation for the OT would be "the law and prophets." Thus, Moses would represent the law and Elijah the prophets, but I don't think that quite works because Elijah never wrote any prophetic books. Also, note the text says,

“Elijah with Moses,” as if Elijah is the main one featured here. Others have suggested that it’s because these two figures were persecuted in their ministries, just as Jesus would suffer and die. But that’s true of nearly every godly person in the OT. So, I think it’s because these two are mentioned together in a text about the coming of the day of the Lord—which is being demonstrated in the transfiguration of Jesus. In Malachi 4:4-6, God had declared, “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” Now, here they were, and the Lord himself (Jesus) was indeed with them. Further evidence that Malachi 4 is behind their appearance is seen in the disciples’ question to Jesus about Elijah, which we’ll see as we continue. But worth noting at this point is that as amazing as this all is, it’s not even the climax of this event.

As Peter sees Elijah, Moses, and Jesus together, he makes a suggestion, telling Jesus that they should make three tents, one for each of them. And we could spitball on all the reasons Peter might be suggesting this, but Mark helps us out by noting that Peter was scared and didn’t know what to say. In other words, we’re not to see this as a logical suggestion but a man speaking in fear. Some get scared and are quiet. Others get scared and start talking. Peter is in the latter camp.

But what happens next is the climactic moment of this event. We’re told a cloud overshadowed them and a voice came out of the cloud saying, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” And then Elijah and Moses were gone and only Jesus remained (vv. 7-8).

A few interesting things about this is that God the Father is once more testifying to the identity of Jesus. Jesus is the eternal Son of God. Second, the Father spoke to the disciples. At Jesus’ baptism, Mark had told us that the Father said something very similar, but he spoke directly to Jesus, saying, “You are my beloved Son” (Mark 1:11). Now, he speaks *about* Jesus as he speaks *to* the disciples, saying, “This is my beloved Son.” And he tells them who Jesus is for a reason. He gives them a command in light of who Jesus is, saying, “Listen to him” (v. 7). That is the climactic moment of this event—God the Father tells these three disciples to listen to his Son.

This is interesting for a few reasons. First, this is an event where the sights are crazy. Jesus is transfigured, shining white. Moses and Elijah, who had left the earth years prior, appear with Jesus. A cloud overshadows the mountain. I mean, if ever seeing something was the key to ensuring holiness, this would be the moment. You might anticipate the Father saying, “Look around, boys. Take it in, and you’ll be forever changed.” Instead, he tells them to listen. Listen to Christ’s words. Our Father commands us to make our focus the words of his Son.

Similarly, Peter writes about this moment later in 2 Peter 1:16-21. He mentions the transfiguration in this letter, which isn’t surprising. How could you witness this and neglect to bring up this moment when writing to others? So, Peter brings up to his hearers that he was an eyewitness to the glory of Christ on the mountain and heard the Father speak of his identity. But,

amazingly, he builds up that paragraph in which he talks about this moment to talk about Scripture, telling his readers that it wasn't produced merely by men, but that "men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:21). Why? It's because he remembered the Father's command: listen to him.

And let me state the obvious, inherent in that command to listen to the Son is to obey what he says. That's what truly listening means. Therefore, we can say that what God wants most from you and me is that we would know the words of Christ (Scripture), obey the words of Christ, and teach others the words of Christ so that they might know and obey them as well. That's what Jesus, himself, commanded in the Great Commission. We disciple others by helping them obey all that Christ has commanded. The transfiguration event is a call to listen to and obey Christ's words. And then we see a command to proclaim the resurrected Christ.

A command to proclaim the resurrected Christ

After the Father speaks, Jesus is now alone with his disciples. Moses and Elijah are gone. And they begin coming down the mountain. And once more we read that Jesus charged these three "to tell no one what they had seen" (v. 9). This is now expected in the gospel of Mark, as Jesus says it repeatedly. And, again, I think it's because people had preconceived ideas of what the Messiah would do, and Jesus wasn't going to do those things.

However, there are two things that stand out about this charge of silence. First, it's the last time Jesus will say this in the book. And, second, Jesus qualifies it. Notice that after charging them not to tell anyone what they'd seen, he adds, "Until the Son of Man had risen from the dead" (v. 9). In other words, there's a time when the silence must end and Jesus must be proclaimed, and that time is after Jesus has been raised from the dead.

Well, here we are. Jesus was raised from the dead nearly 2,000 years ago. He's reigning at the Father's right hand, awaiting the day when he'll come to bring final salvation and judgment. And, until then, we are charged to tell others about Jesus. And we can't be cowardly about this. What's the worse they can do, kill us? And even then they'll just usher us into eternity. So, let's make sure we're seizing opportunities to proclaim that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, lived a perfect life, died for our sins, was raised from the dead, and offers forgiveness and eternal life to all who will repent of their sins and trust in him as Lord and Christ. And it's really on that note of the cost of following and proclaiming Christ that this text ends as we see a reminder that our path isn't one of triumphalism but of suffering and vindication.

A reminder that our path isn't one of triumphalism but of suffering and vindication

After Jesus charges them to tell no one what they'd seen until he's risen from the dead, Mark tells us that the disciples were questioning among themselves what in the world "rising from the dead might mean" (v. 10). They knew that at the end of the age, all people will be raised at the resurrection. No doubt they were struggling to square how Jesus was going to be raised all by himself or whether he was referring to the general resurrection. Again, you can see why they

would be confused. But, interestingly, they don't ask him about this. Rather, they ask another question, saying, "Why do the scribes say that first Elijah might come?" (v. 11).

Now, my guess is that this question of Elijah is no doubt connected to the fact that they'd just seen Elijah on the mountain. But it may also be related to the issue of the resurrection that they were confused about. Imagine, for example, that they were thinking that when Jesus referred to his own resurrection, he was referring to the end of the age. Then, here's what they're hearing Jesus saying, "We're going to Jerusalem. When we get there, the Son will suffer, be killed, and then the end of the age will come when all will be raised from their graves." I mean, this could mean they're getting really close to the end of the age. But this raises a question, doesn't it? Malachi had said that before that day Elijah would come. And the scribes have been teaching this same thing—no doubt telling people that you don't have to think the end is at hand until Elijah comes.

So, in the disciples' minds, they may be thinking, "Jesus is telling us we're right near the end of all things, but Elijah hasn't come, and it doesn't look like there's much time for him to get here, so what is Jesus' answer to what the scribes are saying about Elijah coming?" Well, Jesus' answer, perhaps surprisingly to them, is that "Elijah does come first to restore all things." The scribes are right. This is utterly in line with what the prophet Malachi foretold. But then Jesus asks an obvious question—one that the disciples may have been thinking. Jesus asks, "And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? (v. 12). In other words, Jesus is saying, "If it's true that Elijah must come and restore all things, then how in the world does that square with the Messiah suffering and being treated with contempt? After all, that doesn't sound like restoring all things, does it?" But then Jesus answers the question, saying, "But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him" (v. 13).

But how does Jesus' declaration answer the question? How does all of this fit together? Here's how I think it works. Jesus first notes that Elijah has already come, and by saying this, he's referring to John the Baptist. We noted early in Mark's gospel that John not only preached like Elijah but dressed like him. In other words, Elijah was a type of sorts, picturing years earlier the role John the Baptist would play, preparing the people for the arrival of Jesus. Again, Jesus makes explicit that John the Baptist is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Elijah's coming elsewhere (Matt 11:14).

And what happened with John? Well, they did to him whatever they pleased, Jesus tells us. Herod imprisoned him and then had his head cut off at the request of his niece. But if John is Elijah, and Elijah comes to restore all things, then why was John imprisoned and brutally murdered? Those are the pieces Jesus is putting together. Let's put this together in logical steps to understand Jesus' point:

- 1) Elijah was to come and restore all things.
- 2) John the Baptist is Elijah.
- 3) Therefore, John the Baptist came to restore all things.

- 4) John was treated terribly, suffered, and was killed.
- 5) Therefore, suffering and dying are not at odds with restoring all things.
- 6) The Messiah (Jesus) comes to make all things right.
- 7) Jesus is the Messiah and will make all things right.
- 8) Jesus will suffer and be killed.
- 9) But that's understandable because we're already seen that suffering and dying are not at odds with God's work of restoration.
- 10) In fact, we can say that Jesus' suffering and dying are the means God will utilize to bring about his work of restoration.

I think the argument of verses 12-13 goes something like that. And there are implications for Jesus' disciples who were there with him in that moment hearing that and for us today. For them, Jesus was saying, "You're going to be part of God's glorious work of redeeming and restoring this world. You're going to open blind eyes, see hearts of stone transformed, and bring life where there's death. But you too will do this by traveling the road of being persecuted and suffering." And, in fact, they did. Most of these men would be killed for proclaiming that Jesus lived, died, was raised, and reigns as Lord and Christ. Like John and Jesus before them, they would suffer and die.

That's the point we must understand as well. Perhaps, like the disciples, we have this understanding that our mission will be triumphalistic. By that I mean the idea that we will walk through this world conquering in earthly terms. People will hear our message and all surrender their hearts in obedience to Jesus. People will applaud our message. They'll treat us as kings. We'll be the objects of praise and blessing. But that's not real.

The road of restoration—as John, Jesus, and these disciples showed us—is a path of suffering and death. Jesus says that if they treated him like the devil, they'll treat us—his followers—even worse. He tells us that he sends us out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Our mission is to proclaim the risen Christ and teach them to obey all of his commands, knowing that it may cost us everything.

But, just as Jesus showed on that mountain. It ends with our vindication. Death wasn't the last word for Jesus as he rose on the third day, and it won't be the last for us either. We too will rise. We'll dwell with our Lord. As Paul faced death as a martyr for following Christ, he wrote just prior to his execution, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing" (2 Tim 4:7-8). Only a man who knew that martyrdom would lead to vindication could write that. And we know the same. So let's go forth and proclaim the risen Christ, baptizing and teaching disciples to obey all his commands, whatever it costs us because we know that vindication ultimately awaits us, as it did our Lord. Amen.