

THE GOD OF THE MOUNTAINS

Mark 9:1-29

Well life certainly has its mountain top experiences. Some of the high moments are maybe high school graduation, wedding day, the birth of our first child, etc. And the high moments in our life are great and should be celebrated and remembered. But we don't live on the mountain tops. After graduating high school, but the reality of adulthood comes with paying our own bills and realizing it's a lot harder out there than we realized, which typically makes us appreciate our parents more. Another high moment is our wedding day, but then comes the reality of living in harmony and learning to forgive and be patient with one another. Newborn babies come with sleepless nights. Home owning comes with home maintenance.

And in the Christian world, the question has been asked more than once: "How do we carry the mountain top experiences of a good sermon or a good conference or good bible camp into the everyday realm of reality?" Why is that kids go to camp and they become excited about Jesus and put their faith in Him and maybe surrender their lives to Him, but then come back home and the excitement wears off? Why is it that we can have such a great surge of faith listening to a good sermon or bible conference and then as soon as we step into the real world, it sort of drifts off. I think that's something we're going to be addressing as we walk with Jesus and the disciples this morning. **Jesus strengthens their faith in Him literally on a mountain top and then demonstrates the importance of working that faith into the fabric of everyday life as a disciple.**

If you're just joining us we have been making our way through Mark and gleaning some excellent insights from it. Where we're at in this gospel with Jesus' ministry is He is really training these disciples practically, giving them spiritual lessons. Through various experiences and miracles He has been training them to actually do the work of ministry.

It's a lot to read and cover but most of it is descriptive or observation. Mark 9:1-29.

"And they came to And Jesus was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God when it has come with power." And six days later Jesus took with Him Peter, James, and John, and brought them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. And Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. Peter responded and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here; let's make three tabernacles, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." For he did not know how to reply; for they became terrified. Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud: "This is My beloved Son; listen to Him!" And suddenly they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone.

As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant. And they asked Him, saying, "Why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" And He said to them, "Elijah does come first and he restores all things. And yet how is it written of the Son of Man that He will suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I say to you that Elijah has indeed come, and they did to him whatever they wanted, just as it is written of him."

And when they came back to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and began running up to greet Him. And He asked them, “What are you disputing with them?” And one person from the crowd answered Him, “Teacher, I brought You my son, because he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground, and he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and becomes stiff. And I told Your disciples so that they would cast it out, but they could not do it.” And He answered them and said, “O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!” And they brought the boy to Him. When he saw Him, the spirit immediately threw him into convulsions, and falling to the ground, he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth. And He asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to kill him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!” But Jesus said to him, “‘If You can?’ All things are possible for the one who believes.” Immediately the boy’s father cried out and said, “I do believe; help my unbelief!” When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again!” And after crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, “He is dead!” But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him, and he got up. When He came into the house, His disciples began asking Him privately, “Why is it that we could not cast it out?” And He said to them, “This kind cannot come out by anything except prayer.”

I would also add from Matthew 17:20 some more of Jesus’ words here, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.”

Alright, so the first thing we need to do is just recall **where we’re at right now**. Right now, we are up in the north country, north of Galilee in the area of **Caesarea Philippi**. Jesus has just finished telling His disciples very plainly that He is going to be rejected by the Jews and crucified and that if they are going to follow Him they are going to have to take up their crosses as well. That if they want to find their life, they’ll have to lose it in this life for His sake and the gospel’s sake. And this was a real punch to the gut for these guys because they were expecting the Messianic kingdom now – for God to come and rule the world from Jerusalem and overthrow the Roman occupation and to sit on thrones with Jesus any day now. When they read the prophecies about the Messiah in the OT that’s what they saw... the only problem with that is that those prophecies are in reference to His 2nd coming and not His 1st coming. There were 1st Coming prophecies that had to be fulfilled first and He’s trying to get them to understand that, that suffering must come before glory.

In 8:38 He reaffirmed glory is coming but then in verse 1 of chapter 9 He says, “Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God when it has come with power.” And we find out what He means by that when we just keep reading because what Jesus says is exactly what happens. Some of the disciples who were standing there – **Peter, James and John** – didn’t die before they saw the power of the kingdom of God for themselves, **6 days later**.

I. JESUS’ VISIBLE GLORY & POWER ON THE MOUNTAIN OF TRANSFIGURATION. (VV. 1-8)

Jesus takes these 3 men and brought them up on a high mountain with them. Most of you are probably wondering what mountain this is. There’s some religious tradition that thinks this is

Mount Tabor, west of Galilee, but that's just not the area we're in. The mountain near Caesarea Philippi is Mt. Hermon at over 9,000 feet high.

When they get up there, Jesus is praying and the gospel of Luke states that as He was praying, the disciples fell asleep! No surprise, and it's not the last time! But when they woke up, they woke up to **one of the greatest events in the life of Jesus Christ**. They get to see the heavenly glory of Jesus Christ that has been veiled ever since He was incarnated, taking on flesh as a baby. The text says He is **transfigured** before them. That's word is *metamorphoo* from where we get the word metamorphosis. Jesus is morphing from the inside out before their eyes, back into the glory with which He had before He even came into the world (John 17:5)! The glory of His divine nature is shining through His earthly flesh, clearly revealing that He is in fact the Messiah, the God-man.

❖ **Jesus is God.**

Mark says His clothes became whiter than any launderer on earth could make them! Not even bleach could make them this white. Luke says they were gleaming white. Matthew says **His face shone like the sun and His garments were as white as light**. All throughout this gospel we've seen proof that Jesus is God through His teaching and miracles but here, in the middle of the book, just following the apex of Peter's testimony that Jesus is the Christ, this happens, and **the big question is why?** And I think it's mainly because He wants to reaffirm for these men that **even He's going to suffer and die on cross, it's not an accident** or some type of interruption in God's program, but a part of the plan all along. And that **Moses and Elijah**, the two greatest men from the OT **representing the Law and the Prophets (the entire OT)**, were in accordance with it. And that **God the Father reaffirms it and they need to listen to Him**. It's all **to anchor them in the glory that follows suffering** and the glory that is worth the suffering. And that's a lesson for us to take home as it is for these disciples.

It's not always sunshine and roses for a disciple. We live closer to the valleys, in reality, not on the mountain tops. It's tough stuff taking up your cross daily and following Jesus and being disrespected and mistreated by the world and giving up your life to serve others... but you know what? It's worth it. It's worth it because there's great glory coming.

❖ **The suffering now is worth the glory to come.**

Paul says in Romans 8:18 that, "the sufferings of the present times are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us." Sometimes what you need to keep going is just another reminder of the glory of God and the glory to come. That's why it's important to **stay in the Word of God continually to keep an eternal perspective**. One of the verses that prods my mind to stick with it and keep going as your pastor, is 1 Peter 5, where those elders who lead the flock well are promised an unfading crown of glory by the Chief Shepherd when He appears. Think glory.

In verse 4 you see that Moses and Elijah are there talking with Jesus and when you read Luke's account, it says what they're talking about... and you know what they're talking about? Not about a kingdom on earth, but **about His departure – His death and resurrection and ascension**. These two OT saints who have passed on, know the plan. They're in on it. *By the way, they're also a great pledge that whether we die like Moses or are raptured like Elijah, there is life beyond the grave.* But here they are talking about Jesus' departure and Peter has to open his mouth again and starts talking about building tabernacles. The text says he didn't know what to say so he just said that and it reveals that he's really not listening well. They're talking about Jesus sacrifice on the cross that fulfills the Passover Feast and he's interested in the Feast of Tabernacles that is fulfilled by the

Second Coming (Zech. 14). **Peter's thinking kingdom and they're thinking a cross**, but there's a cross before the kingdom.

And then a cloud forms, just like in the OT like on Mt. Sinai and overshadowed them, and God the Father audibly speaks, saying, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!" You know you need to stop talking when God the Father literally speaks up and rebukes you. **You know what would've better? If Peter had just stood in awe at the Majestic Glory (2 Peter 1:16-18) in front of him and listened.** Not asking anything, not saying anything, just being satisfied with being in God's presence in this majestic moment and listening to Him.

And I think there's just a huge insight in that for our inner spiritual lives because this is what most of inner, private, spiritual lives looks like. Our quiet time, our private world with the Lord, more than likely looks like this... we're talking and telling God what He should do and giving sincere but repetitious thanks for a few things but we have a hard time just slowing down and adoring God and really listening to His Word. You know, in the prayer acronym ACTS (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication), Adoration gets skipped. We need to learn to meditate upon God and His Word. We can read and read and read but if we don't meditate on a text, we don't take it in well. And that's important because we too, are transformed from the inside out. By the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:1-2).

❖ **Our inner private life with God regulates our outer public life.**

When you order your private, inner world, you order your outer world. From the heart flows the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). That's something the Pharisees missed in Jesus' day – they were focused on the outside and not the inside. He said God made the outside *and* the inside and if you'd just take care of the inside, giving the inside charity, the outside would be taken care of (Lk. 11:40-41). Whether or not we take care of our inner life, **our hearts need to commune with God**, results in 2 trajectories: If you have a consistent devotional life you'll be a person of rich spiritual qualities that get better and better the last half of your life. But if we fail, we'll become a flash in the pan and the last half worse. If we want our church to be a wellspring of life that is overflowing with spiritual life, it starts with each individual being disciplined in their personal time with the Lord over the long haul. Maybe it's time for you to start spending time in the Word again, and really listening, and meditating on God and on His Word and getting the journal out to write it down.

II. **DISCUSSION OF ELIJAH ON THE DESCENT FROM THE MOUNTAIN. (VV. 9-13)**

But as they begin descending from the mountain, Jesus tells them not to tell anyone about what just happened until after the resurrection. And so they start talking about Messiah dying and the question in verse 11, "Why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" comes up because they just saw Elijah but he didn't do much. And because of a prophecy in Malachi 4, the last two verses of our OT, every person and their dog was waiting for Elijah. The prophecy says, "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse." What's Jesus' reply? "Elijah does come first and restore all things. And yet how is it written of the Son of Man that He will suffer and be treated with contempt? But I say to you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him."

So He does two things here: One is, He corrected them in that **a type of Elijah has already come in the person of John the Baptist** who ministered in the spirit of Elijah (Lk. 1:17). Elijah preached

repentance and brought restoration but served as a type of Elijah for the First Coming and the First Coming needed a type because the kingdom was offered. God knew, however that Jesus would be rejected and die and there would be a kingdom postponement from the earthly perspective. But secondly, **he reaffirmed for them that Elijah is still coming before the great and terrible day of the Lord** because the Scripture must be fulfilled.

And what “**the great and terrible day of the Lord**” is the day Jesus returns to earth. “*The Day of the Lord*” in Scripture it seems, in a broad sense can refer to all the eschatological, future events including of the 70th week of Daniel (The Tribulation of God’s Wrath lasting 7 years) and the Second Coming and Millennium (1,000 years). But “*The Great and Terrible Day of the Lord*” is much narrower. It refers to the actual, literal day that Jesus returnsⁱ to set up His kingdom, when as He just said, comes with His angels in glory and judges Satan and rebellious mankind. It’s the grand climax of Christ’s Second Coming in judgment on a Christ-rejecting world.

I think Elijah himself will still come and play a major role in the opening of the eyes of the Jews as to who Jesus is and that they missed the first time of their visitation but better not miss the second. Some Bible students think that because of the miracles that Moses and Elijah did in their ministries and the miracles that the two witnesses do during the tribulation period like turning water to blood (Moses) and stopping the rain (Elijah) that these two will be the two witnesses. We cannot say for sure.

But the key word from this that stands out is the word **departure**. Jesus won’t be setting up the kingdom, but departing – going to the cross. And guess what that Greek word for departure is: ***exodos* – like Exodus**. It just adds to the whole Moses and Mt. Sinai theme. Moses brought an exodus for God’s people through His confrontation with Pharaoh saying, “Let My people go.” And they slaughtered the Passover lambs and he gave the sons of Israel the glory of the Old Covenant Law on Mt. Sinai and there Moses’ face shined for a while so that he had to wear a veil. But **Jesus, through His exodus, His departure – as thee Passover Lamb – is bringing a new and better exodus, with a New Covenant, on a new mountain, with greater glory and greater freedom from the *penalty and power of sin, and eventually the presence of sin.***

2 Corinthians 3:7 says, “But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could no look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it. For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory. Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech, and are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”

Don't you love that? Only in Christ are the veils of spiritual darkness removed and freedom found. Only when we gaze upon the face of Christ are we transformed. **Faith in Jesus Christ – trusting in Jesus Christ – is the only answer.** That's the only answer for salvation is to receive the grace of God offered you in Christ. But **faith in Christ is also the answer for living and doing ministry.**

We see that as we come to the next scene where the disciples are trying to cast out a demon and they can't.

III. **JESUS FREES A BOY FROM DEMON POSSESSION. (VV. 14-29)**

And why can't they? By now, they've cast out many demons in their missionary journey throughout Israel in chapter 6. They've been doing this for a while now. And you know, I think that's exactly the problem. They've been at it so long that they've lost sight of their dependence upon the Lord.

The lack of faith present is emphasized by the response of the father, 'If You can do anything, take pit on us and help us!' In all defense, this has been going on since childhood and no one has been able to help him. **It's a seemingly impossible situation by all means! But not with God.** Jesus says, "*If You can?* All things are possible to him who believes." And He casts out the demon.

Nothing is impossible with an all-powerful God if it's in accordance with His will and nature (for example, He can't lie). But we know **they've forgotten their dependence upon Him, the inner trust in Him because why? They didn't pray.** The problem wasn't in God's power, but in the disciples who had forgotten their dependence upon God to do ministry. Faith expresses itself through prayer. A prayerless ministry is a powerless ministry. No wonder Spurgeon said, "Neglect of **private prayer** is the locust which devours the strength of the church."

❖ **A prayerful ministry is a powerful ministry.**

Think of it like a **plumbing system**. There is a reservoir of God's power to do ministry always on there and always full. It's never lacking because He's infinite in power. And there is pipe running from that to us, resembling faith. Faith is the pipe through which comes to us but prayer is like the faucet that we have to turn on.ⁱⁱ **Faith and prayer testify that spiritual power is not in oneself but in God alone.** Power to do ministry only comes through a dependent relationship with Him.

And I think that's exactly what happens to most of us who come off of a spiritual mountain top experience and hit a lull when we come back to reality. Certainly it's one of the reasons. The inner life, our relationship with the Lord makes or breaks the outer, public life of the disciple. At camps and at conferences we're around God's people and we're in the Word and we're seeking the Lord through prayer and expecting Him to work, but then we encounter the real world and just stop. But if we're going to see mountains moved in the lower area of reality, we've got to keep looking to the Christ of the mount of transfiguration.

❖ **If you believe in the Jesus Christ, He can move serious mountains in your life.**

This is where Matthew 17:20 finally comes into play. He says to them "if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you." What's the mountain is He talking about? He's talking about the clash with satanic kingdom in the story. In Scripture the word **mountain is often used symbolically, referring to a king and kingdom and throne.** Our dependence upon the glorious and powerful Christ that we saw on the first mountain gives us power over the mountains we face in reality.

ⁱ Renald Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come!* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1995), 35.

ⁱⁱ Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights: Mark* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007), 247-248.