

## **Listen to the King of the Kingdom**

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The Gospel of Mark: Mighty and Mild / Mark 9:1-13 / January 28, 2024

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### **Introduction:**

Today we pick back up in our series, “The Gospel of Mark: Mighty and Mild.” We started this series in January of last year and worked our way through the end of chapter eight before breaking in the fall. Mark’s gospel is structured in such way that you can almost divide it evenly into two major themes centered on the good news of Jesus Christ. In the opening verses, Mark highlights prophetic fulfillment, God declaring Jesus to be His beloved Son at Jesus’ baptism, and Jesus proclaiming the gospel, calling for repentance because the kingdom of God was at hand. In the 8 chapters that follow this opening, Mark focuses on the theme of Jesus as the mighty Messianic King holding power and authority of the physical and spiritual realms. That focus ends with Peter declaring Jesus to be the Christ, Jesus foretelling the suffering of the Son of Man, Peter not understanding the necessity of the cross, and Jesus teaching on following him in sacrifice. This began the shift to the focus of the second half of his gospel, showing Jesus Christ was not only mighty, but mild, coming to conquer through suffering. As James Edwards says well, in the predictions of His death and resurrection, “Jesus radically reinterprets messianic triumphalism by means of the humiliation of the Son of Man, indeed, by his suffering and death” (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 261). This doesn’t negate a future physical victory over all things, as Jesus points to that Mark 8:38, but it does show how the triumph of God’s Messianic king comes in an unexpected way. We pick up today in chapter 9 with a transition to Mark’s closing theme of the necessary suffering of the Son of Man and what that reveals about the kingdom of God. Look at how that transition begins in Mark 9:1, “And he said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.’” Note how Mark connects this with the previous words of Christ by saying “And he said to them.” This saying rightly leads to some important questions. What does it mean that some present will “not tasted death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power”? If the power of the kingdom doesn’t come until Christ’s second coming, how can this be true since everyone present with Jesus has died before His return? To answer those questions, we must first recognize that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all place this statement before the story of Jesus’ transfiguration. In doing so, they make an intentional connection with that moment and Jesus’ statement. Two suggestions have been made for this connection. Let me introduce them and then work through our passage to share my conclusion and what it means for us. The first suggestion is that Peter, James, and John are the ones who see the coming kingdom power as they witness the transfiguration of Jesus Christ. That, as they see Jesus’ glory on the mountain, they are given a preview of His future glory to be see at His return when He establishes His earthy kingdom in power. The second suggestion is that the display of Jesus’ glory on the mountain shows the power of the kingdom is directly connected to Jesus Himself and has come through His work on the cross. This would mean the power of the kingdom doesn’t come after Christ’s second coming but after His death and resurrection. To determine Jesus’ intended meaning, we need to look closely at the story of the transfiguration and ask what it points our attention to. First, in verses 2-8, Mark points our attention to our need to

### **See and Listen to the King of the Kingdom**

Because of Mark’s fast paced style of writing, we can be tempted to read too quickly through this scene and miss its significance. So, let’s work through this slowly together. Look at verses 2-3, “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 his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them.” Mark starts with a rare mention of time to link this moment with all that has taken place since Peter’s confession. Note how he says Jesus took Peter, James, and John to the mountain “after six days.” He also focuses our attention on the mountain with descriptive language, calling it “a high mountain.”

This is most likely Mt. Hermon as it is a high and secluded mountain in the region of Caesarea Philippi, a significant mountain in redemptive history. Then Mark describes the transfiguration of Jesus that will take our breath away if we can comprehend it. When he says Jesus was transfigured, he uses the word we get metamorphosis from, meaning Jesus literally changed before them. This change made His clothes so intensely white, unlike any bleach could produce, that Mark describes them as radiant. Don't rush past this church. Dwell on this moment. Think deeply of the radiance of Jesus. In Matthew's account, he says Jesus' face shone like the sun. Luke tells us the appearance of Jesus' face looked like a flash of lightning that caused the disciples to wake up from being sleepy. Church, this wasn't a spotlight shining on Jesus, it was a radiance that emanated from Him, a radiance so bright and marvelous that words can't even fully describe it. Pause to imagine what this might have been like. Notice what happens next in verse 4, "And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus." Two things are significant here, the identification of Elijah and Moses and how they are "talking with Jesus." Interestingly, Mark leaves out what they were talking about, but Luke says it was Jesus' departure from Jerusalem. Mark also places Moses second, being "with Elijah," where Matthew and Luke both say "Moses and Elijah" appeared. By this moment in history, Moses and Elijah had become common representatives of the law and prophets respectively, which often signified the whole of scripture. This may be one reason for them talking to Jesus, pointing out how all of scripture points to Him. I think their significance goes deeper than that though. The reference to a high mountain, with the presence of Moses and Elijah, also alludes back to moments each of them had on the mountain of God where God let them see a glimpse of His glory as he passed by them. Now, they are standing with Jesus Christ as His glory is radiantly shining, suggesting it is the same glory shown to Moses and Elijah. Yet, it likely goes even deeper. There is only one passage in the Old Testament where Elijah and Moses appear together. In Malachi 4:4-6, the Lord says, "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. 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." This is the closing words of the Old Testament canon, and it places Moses and Elijah together before the awesome day of the Lord, which is the day of judgement promised prior to the establishment of the kingdom of God. Beyond all of Scripture pointing to Jesus, and beyond His glory being God's glory, the appearance of Elijah with Moses symbolizes both of them pointing to the eschatological kingdom of God, showing Jesus' arrival is the culmination of God's prophetic promises. This is further confirmed as we continue to observe the scene. Look at verses 5-6, "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." The climax of this scene is right here, as we see Peter's fear causing him to suggest building three tents, or tabernacles because what they were experiencing was a good thing. Peter may be connecting this moment to the Feast of Tabernacles designed to point to the day when God would dwell forever with man in His kingdom. Church, Peter's request isn't entirely foolish, the presence of God had come to dwell with man in Jesus, but his expectation lacked an understanding of the necessity of the cross and resurrection. He had yet to learn that Christ's victory over sin and death needed to precede God's everlasting dwelling with man. Our redemption needed to first be secured. Continue in verses 7-8, "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." The cloud overshadowing them undoubtedly alludes to the glory of God appearing to Moses at Mt. Sinai. Then, in the resolution to Peter's fear, we hear the Father announce again, as He did at Jesus' baptism, "This is my beloved Son," along with a powerful and pointed command, "listen to him." This is the main point of this scene. The primary point of Jesus' transfiguration is to bring all of us, like Peter, James, and John to this moment where we hear these words and respond in faith. "Listen to Jesus."

Using identical words as the Septuagint, this recalls the word of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15, where he says, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.” Jesus is that promised prophet and we are commanded to listen to him. As we see Elijah and Moses vanish out of sight in verse 8, with only Jesus remaining, we are shown their witness was not equal to His but always intended to point to Him, so we would listen to Jesus. The work and word of Moses and Elijah are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Church, consider what this is saying to us. If you are not listening to Jesus, you have missed the point of all of this. If you don’t have the Son, you don’t have hope. See His glory in the transfiguration and have it cause you to listen to Him. See him as the promised king of the kingdom. Listen to the truth He discloses about His death and resurrection. Listen to the commands He gives. Listen to the promises He makes. We need to see and listen to the King of the Kingdom. The second need Mark draws our attention to, in verses 9-13, is our need to

### **Understand what Precedes the Coming of Kingdom Power**

Where verses 1-8 lead to the climax and resolution of this scene, verses 9-13 hold the trailing action that confirms the importance of Jesus’ transfiguration. Look at verses 9-10, “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.” Just as Jesus commanded silence following Peter’s confession, He commands silence here, linking those moments together. However, He puts a limit on that silence this time. He tells them to, “tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.” Note a couple of things in these verses. First, in verse 9, how Jesus speaks again of the Son of Man dying. Second, in verse 10, how they obeyed but questioned “what this rising from the dead might mean.” Their questioning is likely not about the possibility of resurrection because Peter, James, and John saw Jesus raise Jarius’ daughter in chapter 5. Their question is similar to Peter’s failure back in chapter 8. How could the Son of Man suffer and die? They had just seen Jesus’ glory and appear to have connected it with the coming kingdom power, but still don’t understand the necessity of His death. Understanding the significance of the title Son of Man helps us understand why. This title comes from Daniel 7:13-14 which speaks of the Son of Man given authority, glory, and a kingdom when he comes. They have seen Jesus’ glory, and He has disclosed himself as the Son of Man, surely, He won’t really die after what has been written about him. This leads to their question in verse 11. Look at verse 11, “And they asked him, ‘Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?’” Note how their question is connect to Elijah and the scribes teaching on his purpose. The scribes understood Elijah’s return in relation to Malachi 4:6, as one who comes before the final day of God’s wrath. So, their question is essentially “wouldn’t Elijah’s return mark the coming power of kingdom, not the suffering of the Son of Man.” Notice how Jesus answers their question in verses 12-13, “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.’” Jesus confirms the understanding of the scribes, “Elijah does come first to restore all things,” but points them again to the suffering of the Son of Man as written of him. He is essentially saying, don’t cling to one aspect of the prophetic word without seeing the whole story. Keep it all together. Don’t leave out Isaiah 52-53 in your understanding. Don’t miss the importance of the Son of Man’s suffering in God’s plan of redemption and the establishment of His kingdom. Then, in verse 13, he shows that Elijah has in fact come, and even he suffered as well. Mark doesn’t directly connect this to John the Baptist, but he alluded to it in chapter 1 through his work and chapter 6 through his death. Matthew makes sure we know they understood this to be John the Baptist. Think about the significance of this trailing action with me. Elijah was correctly understood to precede the day of the Lord, which would usher in the power of the kingdom. Elijah appears on the mountain with Jesus, and Jesus says Elijah has come, meaning what comes next in God’s plan of redemption is the day of the Lord and the Son of Man receiving authority, glory, and His kingdom. Yet, Jesus shows that suffering must precede that glory.

We need to understand what precedes the coming of kingdom power. It is the coming of Elijah, but more importantly it is Christ's work on the cross. His suffering preceded His glory. His suffering secured the coming power of the kingdom, because it defeated our greatest enemy. His work on the cross defeated the power of Satan, sin, and death by standing in our place and receiving God's wrath for our sin. Satan can no longer accuse those who are covered by the blood of Jesus. Sin's power in the lives of those who trust in Jesus has been broken. And there is no more sting of death for all who believe. Oh church, see and listen to the king, understand what precedes kingdom power, and trust in His death and resurrection. Before I share what I believe it means for some to see "the kingdom of God after it has come in power," let me encourage you not to focus primarily on that. Focus primarily on the main point of this passage seen in the climax and resolution of verses 6-7. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of Man, who suffered and died for our sin, listen to him. Listen and obey. Listen and worship.

### **Conclusion:**

Yet, I do want to conclude with what I am persuaded verse 1 means, because I think it is important. Does Jesus mean in verse 1 that some would see a preview of the power of His future kingdom at the transfiguration? Or that some would see the kingdom after it has come in power through His death and resurrection? My conclusion is both. This not uncommon in Biblical prophecy. Often, Biblical prophecies have a dual focus, an already but not yet dimension to them. At the transfiguration, Peter, James, and John saw a display of the future glory of Jesus and kingdom power than we cannot begin to imagine. Yet, in seeing that glory, they were called to listen to Jesus who constantly speaks of the kingdom being at hand and in their midst, because the kingdom of God is the rule and reign of the King. In Matthew 28:18-20, following His death and resurrection, Jesus declares, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, has received dominion, glory, and a kingdom. A kingdom He tells Pilate is not of this world. We live in the already but not yet kingdom. Colossians 1 tell us we have been transferred to the kingdom of Christ. Ephesians 3 tells us His power is at work within all who believe. Hebrews 12 tells us to be thankful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. And yet, 2 Peter 1 tells us there is an entrance into an eternal kingdom still to come. Christ's kingdom was inaugurated in power at His death and resurrection, and it will be consummated in power at His return. Peter, James, and John did see a preview of the final glory of Christ before they tasted death. And they, along with others did see the power of the kingdom come through his death and resurrection before they tasted death. So, what does this mean for us? This already but not yet reality of the kingdom should comfort our hearts because Jesus is currently reigning in power and will one day return in power. As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of response, set your hearts and minds on the king, Christ Jesus. Think of His power at work in you and the world today, and His coming power promised to come when His kingdom is consummated. If you have yet to trust in Jesus, see His power and glory in this passage and respond in faith, trusting in His death and resurrection for your sin. If you know Christ, trust in His power over all things and promise to be with you to the end of the age. Listen to Him with a desire to cling to His every word and follow Him in obedience. Respond however the Lord leads. Maybe you need to request His power to heal you or help you forgive. Maybe you need to seek His power to overcome sin or temptation. Whatever you need, know He will provide exactly what you are asking for or something even better, the joy of His presence. As always, we have a team of people ready to pray with you and for you who will be worshipping on the front rows or the bottom of the stairs in the back. Pray with me as we seek God's grace together.