**JESUS’ GLORIOUS IMAGE  
Mark 9:1–13**

**“*His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them*” (vs. 3).**

In last week’s passage, Jesus taught his disciples a difficult message about the true nature of his messianic mission. He declared that as the Messiah, he would be rejected, suffer, die, and rise again on the third day. He taught that his followers also must suffer, denying themselves and taking up their own crosses to come after him. Jesus’ disciples were shocked—especially Peter, who even rebuked Jesus. Their hopes of an earthly messianic kingdom were shattered *and* their own self-denial and suffering was predicted as necessary. Jesus knew what his disciples needed to find the strength to shoulder their crosses—a glimpse of his heavenly glory. As we consider this passage, let’s gaze upon Jesus’ glorious image so that we also can find the strength to follow our Lord along the path that leads to glory.

1. **The Transfiguration of Jesus (vs. 1–3)**

The beginning of Mark chapter 9 concludes Jesus’ address to the crowd and his disciples. Look at verse 1: “***And he said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.’***” We normally associate the coming of the kingdom of God with the second coming of Christ, but that still hasn’t happened and certainly didn’t happen in the lifetimes of any of his listeners, so Jesus was referring to something else. Elsewhere, Jesus taught that his driving out demons by the power of God indicated that the Kingdom of God had indeed come (Luke 11:20), so in some sense Jesus’ powerful ministry showed that God’s kingdom had come. The power of the Holy Spirit poured out upon the infant church at Pentecost also demonstrated the advent of God’s kingdom on earth. But in all three synoptic gospels, Jesus’ prediction here immediately precedes his transfiguration. Jesus’ transfiguration was conclusive evidence of the powerful arrival of the kingdom of God because Jesus thereby displayed his divine power and royal splendor as the King who had come to his people. Where the King has come with power, there his kingdom also is.

Look at verse 2a: “***After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone.***” Jesus took his top three disciples with him to the summit of a tall mountain in the region, possibly Mount Hermon near Caesarea Philippi. What did the three disciples witness atop the mountain? Let’s read verse 2b–3 together: “***There he was transfigured before them. 3 His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.***” Until now, Jesus had appeared as an ordinary man. Isaiah described the incarnate Jesus as plain: “*…He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain”* (Isa 53:2b–3a).For a moment, however, high above the world, Jesus set aside the nature of a servant, exposing the light of the world in his full splendor. Whereas, in Exodus 34, Moses’ radiant face coming down from the mountain *reflected* the glory of the LORD, Jesus gleamed with the light of his own intrinsic majesty, eclipsing the noonday sun above. Because of the blazing radiance of Jesus’ glory shining through, his garments became dazzling white. To the disciples, Jesus’ splendor defied the descriptive power of language. Mark described Jesus’ luminous raiment as shining exceedingly white as snow, such as no earthly launderer could whiten. No material on earth can approach the brilliant incandescence of the Son of Man. Matthew records that “*His face shone like the sun*” (Mt 17:2), and Luke describes his clothes “*as bright as a flash of lightning*” (Lk 9:29); they liken Jesus’ appearance to two blinding natural phenomena that remind us of our mortal frailty before the majestic Creator God.

The apostle John, who was with Peter and James on the mountain, described a similar vision of the glorified Christ in Revelation 1:14–16: “*The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. 15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. 16 … His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.*” The true appearance of Jesus Christ given in Scripture displays his divine power and holiness, his spotless moral purity, and his incomparable beauty. The glory of King Jesus gives us a glimpse into his kingdom, for the New Jerusalem “*… does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp*” (Rev 21:23). The heavenly city wherein God’s people will dwell eternally is bathed continuously in the light of Christ’s glory.

The glorious image of Jesus, which the disciples beheld on the mountain would remain burned in their minds. Peter, nearing his own departure from the world, recounted this experience in 2 Peter 1:16–18: “*For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ 18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.*” As an eyewitness, Peter knew that the transfiguration was no man-made tale. Peter’s life and his death prove the veracity of this account. For Peter suffered much, following and preaching Jesus, yet he rejoiced to be counted worthy to suffer for the sake of Jesus’ name (Acts 5:41). The glorious image of Christ fixed in Peter’s mind transfigured sufferings and hardships into glory and joy. So he encouraged struggling believers in 1 Peter 4:13, “*But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*” Peter could endure present suffering and dangers and live for the gospel because he set his sights on the future glory.

As followers of Christ, we should fix our eyes on him, meditating on his glorious image and the glory of his kingdom. This world continually tries to seduce us with glittering, attractive, and ungodly images presented everywhere in media and the internet. We must be careful what images we allow into our hearts and on what we choose to meditate. When we are infected by ungodly images, then we lose spiritual strength and desire to blend into the easygoing culture. At such times, we must ask Jesus to come into our hearts and shine his glorious image within us. Such glory is the sure hope of all who follow Jesus, which motivates us to stay faithful and pure until the end, even through trials.

1. **The Visit of Moses and Elijah (vs. 4–6)**

At Jesus’ transfiguration, he was visited by two of his saints who remained faithful through many trials. Look at verse 4: “***And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.***” Out of all the faithful men and women in the Old Testament, why did these two appear with the glorified Jesus? Actually, there is much significance to these two visitors. Moses, through whom God gave Israel the Ten Commandments and the Pentateuch, represents the Law, and Elijah, the great miracle worker and spokesman of God, represents the prophets. Together, they stood for the whole of Old Testament Scripture, which testified to Jesus and which Jesus had come to fulfill. Moses and Elijah also foreshadowed Jesus as God’s prophets through whom God delivered his people: Moses delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt, and Elijah delivered Israel from Baal-worship atop Mount Carmel. Moses and Elijah both suffered and were rejected by God’s people, spending years as fugitives from those who sought their lives. Moses and Elijah both had encounters with the glory of God on Mount Sinai; many centuries later they encountered God’s glory again on a different mountain.

Mark mentions that the two of them were talking with Jesus; Luke 9:31 records the subject matter of their conversation: “*They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.*” Moses and Elijah conversed with Jesus about Jesus’ imminent suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. Perhaps they encouraged Jesus to fulfill God’s words spoken through them. God had used their sufferings to bring redemption for his people, but that was only a dim shadow of how God would use the suffering of the Messiah for the salvation of the world.

We too can be encouraged by Moses and Elijah. The examples written in the Law and the Prophets of the saints who remained faithful to God through persecution can strengthen us follow Jesus no matter what. Luke 9:30 records that “*Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor*”. There’s no doubt that these two holy prophets are preeminent among God’s servants. But Jesus promises such splendor to all his victorious followers. In Revelation 3:5, Jesus promises, “*The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.*” If we are faithful to Jesus and his kingdom to the end, Jesus will give us white garments like his and acknowledge us as his own before his Father. Paul planted hope in the Corinthian church not just for new clothes, but new, glorious, powerful spiritual bodies that bear the image of Christ (1 Co 15:43,49). Those who lose their lives for Christ and for the gospel will shine gloriously in the kingdom of God forever.

What was Peter’s response to the glorious scene of the shining Christ speaking the gospel to Moses and Elijah? Look at verses 5–6: “***Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." 6 (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)***” Again, Peter got it wrong, though since he was in the fearsome presence of the Holy One of God, we can sympathize with his blunder—I’m sure I would not have known what to say either. Peter’s suggestion to Jesus shows his strong desire to stay there. Illuminated by the light of Christ, Peter was ready to forsake all the world to set up camp on the sacred mountain. Having tasted heaven, Peter didn’t want to depart but to maintain that experience. But that wasn’t the point. Jesus *must* depart, and Peter couldn’t stay there either. Peter wanted the kingdom of God without suffering, and that could not be.

We can learn from Peter’s remarks how good it is to be in the presence of Christ, which makes us forget all the pleasures and comforts of the world. I’m reminded of Bible conferences, where I can taste God’s kingdom through hearing his word and sharing joyful fellowship with his saints. Often at the end of conferences, I wish I could just stay there and enjoy communion with Christ and his church forever, instead of going back to the normalcy of daily life. But that’s not the point. Conferences and retreats serve not as our residence or mission field, but rather equip us to serve Christ’s mission in the ministry where he has called us. I should remember the times of intimacy with Christ I shared—the powerful messages and spirit-filled worship—not so I can seek to re-experience them on earth, but so I can receive strength to serve Christ, knowing that those are just the tiniest foretastes of heaven.

So-called mountaintop experiences give us a glimpse of eternal life in God’s kingdom, which is our ultimate goal. We should hold on to those memories, setting our hope in God’s kingdom.

The visit of Moses and Elijah showed the disciples a picture of glorious fellowship of the saints with the Lord in the kingdom of God. But Moses & Elijah were not the only heavenly guests at this event, nor were they the most glorious.

1. **The Voice of God (vs. 7)**

Look at verse 7: “***Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: ‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!’***” When God’s glory appeared in the Old Testament, his holy presence was often accompanied by a cloud, preventing people from seeing his glory directly and perishing thereby. For example, his appearance to Israel on Sinai (Ex 19:16), his descent on the Tabernacle at its completion (Ex 40:34), and his entrance to Solomon’s temple after its dedication (1Ki 8:10). So the cloud covered Jesus and his disciples and God’s voice spoke to them: “***This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!***” Let’s think about the meaning of these three simple phrases God speaks about his Son, Jesus.

First: “***This is my Son***.” God the Father declares that Jesus is his Son. In a certain sense all people are children of God, for he made us in his image. And in another sense, all who believe in Jesus are given the right to become children of God—adopted into God’s family by grace through faith (Gal 3:26). But Jesus is the only begotten, firstborn Son of God, who is himself God. As the author of Hebrews puts it, “*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being*” (Heb 1:3). This puts Jesus far above every other prophet, above every created being. Psalm 2 is a messianic Psalm wherein the LORD addresses the Messiah, “*You are my son*” (Ps 2:7), and promises him worldwide dominion. Alongside the revelation of Jesus’ transfiguration, God the Father testified to Jesus’ deity and sonship to teach Jesus’ disciples about who Jesus is.

Second: “…***whom I love***.” God the Father proclaims his love, how pleased he is with his beloved Son, Jesus. It’s true that God loves the world (Jn 3:16), but God has a special love relationship with his only begotten Son from before the creation of the world. Whereas God’s love for us is completely undeserved grace, God loves Jesus because Jesus is supremely worthy of love, perfectly lovely in every way. Based on their love relationship, Jesus sought the glory of his Father in everything he did and completely obeyed all his Father’s commands, even to the cross. God the Father and the Son revealed this love relationship to Jesus’ disciples. Amazingly, Jesus invites each of us into this divine love relationship (Jn 17:26).

Third: “***Listen to him***.” God commands the disciples, and everyone else, to listen to Jesus and heed his words. This is the logical consequence of Jesus’ identity—that his words are eminently worthy of our attention and acceptance. This reminds us of God’s messianic prophecy through Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15: “*The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.*” Again, God confirms Jesus’ identity as the Messiah.

We should heed God’s command and listen to Jesus absolutely. There are many ways that Jesus speaks to people, but the primary way is through his words in Scripture. It is possible to read Scripture superficially without actually listening to Jesus, as the Pharisees did. So we should read and study Scripture with humility and repentance, reflecting sincerely and prayerfully on Jesus’ words and applying them to our lives. It is especially important to listen to Jesus’ hard sayings that we don’t like—especially his teachings of self-denial, suffering, and death—for wrestling to submit ourselves to God’s word is how we can mature in faith and bear fruit. Jesus was about to give his disciples—and us—an opportunity to put God’s command, “***Listen to him***,” into practice by teaching another lesson about suffering on the way back down the mountain.

1. **What Is Written? (vs. 8–13)**

“***Suddenly, when*** [Jesus’ disciples] ***looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus***” (8). It was time to leave God’s manifest presence and return to the world. The glorious image of Jesus was once more veiled, leaving the humble form of a servant.

Look at verses 9–10: “***As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. 10 They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what ‘rising from the dead’ meant.***” Again, we see Jesus keeping his identity as the Messiah secret during his earthly ministry to avoid attracting militaristic nationalists and unnecessary confrontations with his adversaries before the appointed time. Amazingly, even though Jesus had told them plainly about his impending death and resurrection, the disciples still couldn’t understand what Jesus meant by “rising from the dead.”

And that wasn’t all they didn’t understand. Look at verse 11: “***And they asked him, ‘Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?’***” Instead of pondering Jesus’ glory, the disciples were considering Elijah’s appearance, probably wondering if his visit on the mountain was the coming of Elijah prophesied by Malachi that would herald the Messiah (Mal 4:5).

Look at Jesus’ answer in verses 12–13: “***Jesus replied, ‘To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? 13 But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him.’***” Jesus affirmed the interpretation of the teachers of the law that Elijah would come before the Messiah. Elijah’s work was to “restore all things”—all things necessary “*to make ready a people prepared for the Lord*” (Lk 1:17). But if, as most Jews expected, Elijah was going to restore the national power of Israel, and *that* earthly messianic kingdom would be the prophesied kingdom of God, then why was it necessary for the Messiah to suffer and be rejected? Actually, “Elijah” had already come, and he had suffered just as it was written about him; John the Baptist had suffered and died at the behest of wicked queen Herodias just as Elijah was persecuted by wicked queen Jezebel.

And just as John the Baptist, who had come in the spirit and power of Elijah, suffered and died according to Scripture, so it was written that the Son of Man must suffer, die, and rise again. Jesus changed the focus from his disciples’ earthly messianic dream to the gospel and the cross. Jesus would suffer and die according to the world salvation plan of his Father, who loved him, as it is written. It is also written that Jesus’ followers must suffer. Jesus taught his disciples in John 15:20, “*Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also…*” The apostles also taught the necessity of suffering in Acts 14:22: “…*We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God*…” Paul assured Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12, “*In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*…”

However, in the light of Jesus’ glory, suffering for his name is cause for joy. Paul, though he suffered much, saw suffering as a sign that he was indeed a child of God and as a token of future glory. So he wrote in Romans 8:17–18, “*Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. 18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*”

Jesus suffered much and was rejected according to God’s will, resulting in salvation and glory. Jesus’ life was given to us as an example, that we might imitate his God-centered and mission-centered life to inherit a share of the same glory. Jesus’ glory is our future and eternal glory if we serve him faithfully. So let us fix our eyes on the glorious image of Jesus, who, for the joy set before him, suffered, died, and sat down at the right hand of God (Heb 12:2). May the image of the glorified Christ burning in our hearts strengthen us to follow him with joy along the way of the cross, knowing surely that glory awaits beyond.