

THE CROWN THAT FOLLOWS THE CROSS

Mark 9:1-13

Today we come to one of the most dramatic events in Scripture -- the transfiguration of Jesus. This event followed Jesus' announcement of His suffering, rejection, death and resurrection (8:31) and the cost to those who would follow Him to the cross (8:34).

Jesus made it clear that the Cross (Isa. 53) had to come before the Crown (Dan. 7:13-14).

But God graciously gave the transfiguration to encourage the disciples that the Crown will most certainly follow the Cross.

It is evident Jesus knew the transfiguration was coming. He announced it at least six full days before it happened. I believe the transfiguration took place on Mount Hermon in the area near Caesarea Philippi where Jesus and the disciples had come after the healing of the blind man (8:27). Mount Hermon is 9,000 feet in elevation and fits the description of being a "high mountain".



Verse one of Mark 9 actually belongs with the previous passage where Jesus emphasized both the cost and blessing of following Him to the cross.

Mark 9:1 (ESV)

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."

In 8:38 Jesus referenced His coming in the glory of the Father with the holy angels; a reference to His coming in the glory and power of the Messianic Kingdom. Then He stated in 9:1 that some of those to whom He was speaking would actually see a preview of the glory and power of God's kingdom before they died.

Then follows the transfiguration.

The transfiguration is the fulfillment of the prophecy of 9:1. Peter, James and John were the three blessed to preview Jesus' glory and coming kingdom. Peter later wrote about this experience in 2 Peter 1:16-18. In this letter, Peter encouraged his persecuted readers that Jesus is coming again in power and glory – a power and glory he personally witnessed in the transfiguration.

2 Peter 1:16-18 (ESV)

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. **17** For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," **18** we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

The transfiguration was a momentary, but real manifestation of Jesus' sovereign power which pointed beyond itself to His second coming when He will come "with power and glory" (Mark 13:26).

The Crown is as certain as the Cross.

Peter thus confirmed that our Lord Jesus did give he, James and John a preview of what it will be like when Jesus comes again in glory and power to reign and rule in the Messianic Kingdom.

This was the reason for the transfiguration - to encourage the disciples. Jesus had just announced His suffering, rejection and death (8:31). The transfiguration was given to strengthen their faith, to encourage them that it was not going to end in darkness and disaster, but that it would end in victory and glory. The transfiguration is intended to encourage us when, in our life, we too must take up our cross. We can be assured that our faith will not end in disaster; it is going to end in glory.

Now let us look at the event itself, beginning at verse 2:

Mark 9:2-8 (ESV)

2 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, **3** and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. **4** And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. **5** 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." **6** For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. **7** And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." **8** And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

What an amazing event! There are four dramatic occurrences in this account that catch our attention.

First, there is the glorious change in the Lord Jesus Himself. While Peter, James and John looked on, Jesus began radiating His glory. His garments glistened a white that was not of this earth. He was emanating His pre-incarnate glory and the glory that will be His eternal manifestation in the Kingdom (John 17:5).

Second, Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Jesus. It is implied that the disciples recognized Moses and Elijah. The Scriptures do not tell us why Moses and Elijah, but it may be that these two represented the Law and the Prophets which pointed to the coming of Messiah. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets. Though Luke tells us that they spoke of Jesus' "exodus" from Jerusalem (Luke 9:31) John Mark records nothing of their conversation! Wouldn't we expect that to be a main focus of the event? But it is not because the primary purpose of the event is for the sake of the disciples; to strengthen their faith and commitment in following Jesus through His sufferings to His future glory.

The third element that stands out is Peter's exclamation and offer to make booths (shelters) for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. John Mark tells us in verse 6 that Peter didn't know what he should say in response to this spectacular experience and that he, along with James and John, were terrified by this experience. But what seems to me was taking place in Peter's mind was that this event was not a preview of, but the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom. In other words, still operating out of his first century messianic expectations, Peter thought this was the beginning of Jesus'

messianic reign. And so he offers to build the three temporary shelters as they start to get the kingdom rolling. This is evidence not only of Peter's fear, but also that his messianic paradigm had not yet embraced Jesus' revelation that Messiah must first suffer, die and rise again *before* establishing His Kingdom. Peter is still not "listening" to Jesus in the sense of accepting what Jesus has revealed about the cross.

Peter scarcely got his words out before he was interrupted by the fourth element of this event. Suddenly they were overshadowed with a cloud. Matthew tells us it was a bright cloud, a very bright, shining cloud. It is my conviction that it was the identical cloud mentioned in the Old Testament, which hovered over the tabernacle during the day -- the glory of God, called the Shekinah. They heard a voice speaking out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." There is no doubt that this is a correction of Peter's proposal. The Father Himself was saying, "Peter, this is my beloved Son, listen to Him!"

Mark ends this account by telling us that, as the voice spoke, suddenly the scene faded. They were returned to the normal situation. As he puts it so beautifully, "...they no longer saw any one with them but Jesus only." Jesus Himself remained after the glory had faded.

What an awesome experience for Peter, James and John. We can just imagine their hearts pounding and minds racing to process all they had seen and heard and felt. Years later this memory gave them strength as they too endured suffering and death.

In the next section we have the discussion that ensued as Jesus, Peter, James and John walked down the mountain.

Mark 9:9-13 (ESV)

9 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. **10** So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean.

11 And they asked him, "Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" **12** 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? **13** But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him."

Once again, Jesus prohibits the disciples from telling anyone about their experience on the mountain. How hard would that be especially when they met up with the other disciples?

Why did Jesus do this?

Again, it may be that Jesus wanted to avoid feeding into the popular messianic expectation that He was setting up His kingdom at that time. Was not this the very struggle Peter and the others were having? News of Jesus' glorious appearance along with Moses and Elijah would fuel the belief that He was establishing His kingdom without first suffering.

It is clear they are struggling to grasp the suffering, death and resurrection of Messiah. They kept the matter to themselves, but questioned "what the rising from the dead meant." They did not understand it as it applied to Messiah. Probably, like Martha in the

eleventh chapter of John, they linked this with the great resurrection yet to come, when all the dead will rise, and of which the Old Testament spoke. They could not make the connection, did not see it as referring to the resurrection of Jesus.

The presence of Elijah at the transfiguration and the manifestation of Jesus' glory suggested to the disciples that the end of all things was near; that the Messianic Kingdom was near. According to the prophet Malachi, Elijah must come first to prepare the nation spiritually for the Messiah's coming.

Malachi 4:5-6 (ESV)

5 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. **6** 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."

So as the disciples continue to operate with the idea that the Messianic Kingdom is on the verge of being established, they're wondering about the coming of Elijah.

In His reply, Jesus affirms that Elijah does come before the Messianic Kingdom (more specifically the Great Tribulation) and restores all things. But He again stresses that before the coming of Elijah and the Kingdom, He, the Son of Man, must suffer much and be rejected. They are struggling to understand the difference between the first and second comings of Messiah. They are thinking in terms of the second coming and Jesus is teaching them about the first coming.

But then Jesus said that indeed *Elijah has come*. It seems Jesus was referring to John the Baptist and that John fulfilled at Jesus' first coming the same function that Elijah will fulfill at Jesus' second coming. The expression, *they did to him whatever they pleased*, refers to the suffering and death John experienced at the hands of Herod Antipas and Herodias (6:14-29). In like manner Elijah suffered persecution at the hands of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-3, 10). John the Baptist fulfilled the Elijah prophecy (Mal. 4:5-6) typically (that is, as a *type*¹) at Christ's first coming. Yet Malachi's prophecy (Mal. 4:5-6) indicates that Elijah himself will also appear before Christ's second coming.

The disciples continue to struggle in changing their thinking about the Messiah. Their expectations of a liberating king, shaped by years of rabbinical teaching and personal longing is proving hard to dislodge.

They believe He is the Christ, the Messiah.

But He is saying that suffering and death is His immediate future not glory and power.

But to their credit they continue to follow Him by faith even as they struggle in the renewing of their minds.

And God graciously gave them this awesome preview of Jesus' glory and Kingdom to encourage and strengthen their faith as they followed Him to the Cross and as they proclaimed Him after His resurrection. How precious this memory in those dark hours of their own suffering.

After the Cross comes the Crown!

¹ A *type* is a foreshadowing, a prophecy made not with words, but with objects, events and people.