

Elijah Has Come
Mark 9:9-13
ABC 10/1/23

Turn in your Bibles to Mk 9. Here again we find the centrality of Jesus & His cross. His death & resurrection is the absolute center of our faith. Paul made this plain numerous times. He said in 1 Cor 2:2, **I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, & Him crucified.** He went on & said, **I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (15:3).** In Gal 6:14 he wrote, **may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...** But Paul also made it plain that Jesus' cross is a stumbling block. **We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block & to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews & Greeks, Christ the power of God & the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:23-24).** Why was the cross such a stumbling block, especially to the Jews? It had to do with their expectations of their promised Messiah. God had predicted a glorious kingdom to be established by the Son of David & that the Messiah would reign on David's throne & His kingdom would extend from shore to shore & all the nations would serve Him. The disciples were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. Peter had spoken for all of them when he said, **You are the Christ (Mk 8:29).** They believed Jesus would reign in Jerusalem on David's throne & that He'd crush the Romans. They're convinced all this is just around the corner. Some of them would soon push for positions of power in His kingdom (Mk 10:35-37). None of them had any understanding of the cross & the need for Jesus to die on their behalf. Jesus had to get this truth through to them. He began to do so in Mk 8:31-32 where **He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things & be rejected by the elders & the chief priests & the scribes, & be killed, & after 3 days rise again. & He was stating the matter plainly...** He made it clear but it was inconceivable to His disciples that He'd be rejected by His own people, condemned by the Romans, & be hung on a cross. Jesus had walked on water, calmed the storm, driven out demons, healed the sick, & fed the multitudes. There was nothing He could not do. How could He be rejected & killed? Peter had also spoken for all of them when he rebuked Jesus for saying such things (Mk 8:32). Then comes the Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus took Peter, James & John up a mountain & was transfigured before them. The stunning glory of

Jesus blinded their eyes. Then Moses & Elijah appeared & had a conversation with Jesus about His coming death (Lk 9:31). The disciples still can't comprehend the need for the cross before the glory of the kingdom. They didn't understand that Jesus' death was essential to redeem sinful people from the wrath of God. In our text today, His mission continues to confound them. **1-13**

1. The Command Luke tells us it's the day after the transfiguration, probably morning (Lk 9:37). I'm guessing they hadn't slept much. What they'd seen would've kept them talking & trying to figure out what was going on. I imagine they were anxious to tell everyone what they'd just experienced. *You'll never believe what just happened to me. Wait till you hear this!* But Jesus has different plans. **9**

They expected Jesus to soon reign in His glory & were anxious to tell people the time was now. Why does Jesus silence them? If Peter, James, & John start telling everyone what they'd just seen, everyone would think Jesus' kingdom was here. They don't yet understand Jesus' mission & the need for His death on the cross. JI Packer once wrote, *A partial truth masquerading as the whole truth becomes a complete untruth.*¹ The disciples had only part of the story. They know Jesus is the promised Messiah & Son of God. That's true, but it's only part of the truth. If the disciples tell that partial truth as the whole truth, it becomes an untruth. Before they can say anything, Jesus must 1st die on the cross because without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins (Heb 9:22). The cross must come before the glory. Before He reigns He must die. & they don't have to stay silent forever. Just until the Son of Man rises from the dead. Jesus wants to prevent a premature proclamation of His messiahship until He's fulfilled His mission. The glory of His messianic reign, anticipated in the transfiguration, wouldn't be realized at His 1st entrance into Jerusalem, but after His suffering, death, & resurrection. It will happen at His 2nd coming. Jesus wanted to avoid the proclamation of an incomplete gospel. The central truth of the gospel is His death & resurrection, not that He healed the sick, raised the dead, or glowed brightly for a time with divine glory.²

¹ *Introductory Essay to John Owen's "The Death of Death in the Death of Christ,"* p 2

² John MacArthur, *Mark 9-16*, p 15

2. The Conversation 10

The disciples did obey & kept silent. But the 3 did discuss things among themselves. They were confused about what **rising from the dead meant**. I'm sure they're thinking, *You can't rise from the dead unless you die 1st*, & they didn't get it. Jesus spoke of His resurrection from the dead, implying He would die. What bothers the disciples is that such a death would seem to leave Messianic prophecies unfulfilled. They discussed what **rising from the dead** could mean. Perhaps their questions were along these lines: *How can the Messiah die? Do you think He was referring to the resurrection at the last day? Why is Jesus going to die at all if He's going to rise again?* The issue isn't that they had no idea how a dead person could rise from the grave. Jesus had already raised dead people & the Jewish expectation was of some kind of life beyond the grave (Job 19:26-27; Dan 12:1-2; Mk 12:18-27; Jn 11:23-24). The issue in their minds is **the Son of Man**, Jesus the Messiah, having to die. They couldn't wrap their minds around the Messiah dying. It was inconceivable. Their understanding is still partial as to what's coming for the Messiah. Even though Jesus had just told them **the Son of Man must suffer many things & be rejected ... & be killed, & after 3 days rise again** (Mk 8:31), they didn't get it. They were trying to fit the death & resurrection of Jesus into their belief that the kingdom was about to happen. Jump ahead 6 months or so. At some point during the 40 days between Christ's resurrection & ascension, a time He spent **speaking** to them **of the things concerning the kingdom of God** (Acts 1:3), the disciples eagerly asked Him, **Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?** (6). Their question was understandable. After all, here was the resurrected Messiah speaking to them about His kingdom. They knew of no reason the earthly kingdom couldn't be set up immediately. They still didn't get the full picture. Here in Mark 9, the disciples' question is, *What do death & resurrection have to do with the Son of Man?*³ It's only in light of His death, resurrection, & the sending of the Holy Spirit that they can understand Him & His mission. Jesus isn't just a good guy, a moral man, or a religious leader. Jesus is the God Man who came to die to solve our sin problem, rise from the dead to prove it was all true, & provide the only way anyone can be made right with God. They had yet to

³ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, p 324

understand that Jesus would be the final Passover Lamb. They didn't grasp that He is both God & man. As God He could satisfy God's wrath for our sin on the cross. As Man He could be our Substitute, dying for our sins, then rise from the dead because He had no sin of His own. The thought of Jesus dying is blowing their minds. They believed the Messiah would deliver them from Rome. They didn't understand the Messiah would 1st come to deliver people from their sins. They talk about this over & over on the way down the mountain. But they don't ask Jesus what He meant. & as they discussed their Messiah, it raised a question about the Messiah's forerunner. So they ask Him.

3. The Clarification 11-13

Don't be intimidated by these vss. At 1st they can seem unrelated & confusing. What sparked this question from the disciples? Several things may have contributed to it, including the presence of Elijah on the mountain (9:4-5), the statement of the return of the Son of Man **in the glory of His Father** (8:38), & the earlier speculation by the people that Jesus was Elijah (8:28).⁴ Having just seen Elijah talk with Jesus, they were trying to understand that with what they'd been taught by the rabbis. *How could Jesus be the Messiah if Elijah hadn't yet come? If Jesus is the Messiah, where's Elijah? Why all this talk about Elijah?* The disciples had been taught by their religious leaders that Elijah would come before the Messiah to prepare the way for Him. They had been taught correctly. Malachi writes,

"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, & he will clear the way before Me. & the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; & the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts (Malachi 3:1).

Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great & terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children & the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come & smite the land with a curse (Malachi 4:5-6).

Before **the day of the Lord**, the final judgment of the ungodly & the establishment of His kingdom, Elijah will come. He will restore the nation by calling the people to repent. He will bring people together around belief in the true & living God. The disciples were absolutely convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. But that being the case, where was Elijah? Why wasn't he present, performing

⁴ Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, p 387

all the things he would do to prepare for the Messiah's coming? Shouldn't he have come 1st before Jesus' arrival? Why do the teachers of the law maintain something that can't be true? They already believe that Jesus is the Messiah. So they're really stuck now: *If you are the Messiah & You have come, what's this stuff about Elijah coming before the Messiah? You're already here!* It's a good question, isn't it? It shows they're thinking.⁵ Jesus replied, **Elijah does first come & restore all things** (Mk 9:12). They were correct; Elijah does come before the Messiah & prepare **all things** for His coming. What is this talking about? Let's back up for a minute. Remember the final conversation between Elijah & Elisha? Elijah had anointed Elisha as his successor as God had told him to do. They're walking & talking & there's a school of prophets tagging along. They come to the Jordan River & Elijah takes off his cloak & hits the water with it & it parts like the Red Sea. They walk through & continue talking when suddenly a chariot of fire & horses arrive & Elijah rose to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kgs 2:11). That was around 852 BC. Malachi made his prediction some 400 years later. His prophecy said God would send Elijah as a forerunner before the day of the Lord, which the Jews understood as the coming of the Messiah. In Jesus' day, Jews were expectantly waiting for the Messiah but they knew Elijah was to come 1st. They even put out an empty chair for Elijah at the Passover meal waiting for Elijah to come. That shows their belief in Malachi's prophecy. The disciples are trying to figure this out. They're convinced Jesus is the Messiah, especially now that they've seen His glory & heard God speaking about Him on the mountain. They'd just seen Elijah on the mountain & it seemed he went back to heaven but the Messiah, Jesus, is here. Were the scribes wrong? What does Jesus say? **12**

Jesus uses the moment to teach them about His own suffering. His death & resurrection is the priority here. They're coming down off the mountain & Jesus' cross is just ahead. They need to understand that. Jesus teaches the fulfillment (at least partially) of the prophecy of Elijah. The scribes had it right. Elijah does come 1st. Then He again talks about His suffering, which seems like a random thing to say here but vs 13 will clarify it for us in a minute. There was no place in the disciples' thinking for a dying & rising Messiah. What they believed was what the scribes had

⁵ Alistair Begg, www.truthforlife.org/resources/sermon/transfiguration-part-two/

taught. The Messiah, in their view, would come to conquer & judge His enemies, bring salvation to the Jewish people, & elevate Israel to rule over the world. After destroying all the enemies of Israel & of God, He would establish His earthly kingdom of righteousness & peace. He'd be worshiped, pour out divine blessings on the world, & crush any appearance of evil. Thus, when the disciples heard Jesus repeatedly say He was going to suffer, be arrested, be mistreated, be killed, & then rise again, they couldn't accept it. It was a stumbling block for them; a frightening & profoundly disturbing thought. The disciples ask Him how He could be the Messiah if Elijah hadn't yet come. He then asks them how He could be the Messiah if He didn't suffer as the OT predicted. There's much more written in the OT about the suffering of the Messiah than there is on the forerunner of the Messiah. The suffering & sacrifice of the Messiah is a major theme in the OT. Are the disciples asking about that truth too? Jesus again is pointing to the importance of His coming cross that He must suffer & die on for the sins of His people. That's the main issue promised in the OT, not the forerunner. Where is that written? All over the place. Remember Ps 22? It begins, **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?** David wrote that 1,000 years before Jesus. Then a few vss later he describes the crucifixion in detail. Ps 22:14, 16-17 says, **I am poured out like water, & all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me... They pierced my hands & my feet. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me.** That's crucifixion. Even clearer is Is 53:5-6,

He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him. & by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

The disciples needed to understand that Jesus had to die according to the Scriptures for their salvation & for ours. But, as Jesus had just said, He would also rise from the dead. They didn't get it. **13**

If we have any doubt about what Jesus is talking about, Matthew clears it up. In Mt Jesus says,

I say to you that Elijah already came, & they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist (17:12-13).

Earlier in Matthew Jesus makes this perfectly clear as He says,

Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen *anyone* greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John

the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, & violent men take it by force. For all the prophets & the Law prophesied until John. & if you are willing to accept *it*, John himself is Elijah who was to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear (11:11-15).

John the Baptist is clearly a fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy. There's a clear connection between John the Baptist & Elijah. Remember John's parents, Zecharias & Elizabeth? Zecharias was a priest & one day he was chosen to go into the temple & burn incense. While he's there an angel appears to him & says, **Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, & your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, & you will give him the name John** (Lk 1:13). 4 vss later the angel continues, **It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit & power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, & the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord** (Lk 1:17). What does **in the spirit & power of Elijah** mean? It doesn't mean a reincarnated Elijah. Remember what Elisha had asked Elijah? Elijah said to Elisha, **Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you. & Elisha said, "Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me"** (2 Kgs 2:9). Elijah replied, **You have asked a hard thing. *Nevertheless*, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be *so*** (10). Elijah's an interesting guy. It's like, *I don't know. We'll see if you'll get it. If you don't, you won't*. As they're walking along & talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire & horses of fire appeared & separated them. Elisha saw it & Elijah went to heaven in a whirlwind. The conditions were met. Elisha saw it & cried out, **"My father, my father, the chariots of Israel & its horsemen!"** & he saw Elijah no more (2 Kgs 2:12). Then he tore his clothes & **took up the mantle of Elijah that fell from him & returned & stood by the bank of the Jordan. He took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him & struck the waters & said, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?"** & when he also had struck the waters, they were divided here & there; & **Elisha crossed over** (13-14). What had he asked for? A double portion of Elijah's spirit so that he could carry on like Elijah. **Now when the sons of the prophets who *were* at Jericho opposite *him* saw him, they said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha"** (15). John the Baptist was like that as well. Elijah's spirit rested on him. Remember Elijah's & John wardrobe? There are only 2 vss in the Bible that mentioned a leather belt. One of them is connected with Elijah. 2 Kgs 1:8 says, **He wore a garment of hair, with a *leather* (NASB) belt about his waist** (ESV). Mk 1:6

says, **John was clothed with camel's hair & wore a leather belt around his waist...** John dresses like Elijah & their personalities are similar. I don't think either one would be an enjoyable dinner companion. They aren't comfortable to be around. Their style of dress, their personalities, the way they preached, & where they lived are all alike. They both also ate strange foods. Elijah ate food brought by ravens. Locust & honey were on John's menu. & yet John the Baptist wasn't Elijah come back to life. Here's what John himself says,

This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests & Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" & he confessed & did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" & he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" & he answered, "No" (Jn 1:19-21).

Jesus says John is Elijah (Mt 11:14) & John says he isn't. How do we understand this? Is one of them lying? No. Elijah did come & his name was John the Baptist. John fulfilled the prophecy of the OT. John isn't Elijah but he came **in the spirit & power of Elijah** (Lk 1:17). John the Baptist prepared people for the coming of the Messiah. He proclaimed Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29). Look at vs 13, & **they did to him whatever they wished**. What's that mean? They killed John. So Elijah has already come in John the Baptist & **they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him** (13). Jesus never says anything wrong & never says anything that's a throwaway. Not everything is equally important but everything's equally true. Jesus is speaking of the enemies of John the Baptist, who **did to him whatever they wished**. This obviously refers to how John was killed, the suffering, imprisonment, & beheading of John the Baptist. You remember the story. Herod arrested John & had him put in prison because John was boldly preaching against his marriage to his brother's wife, Herodias. John told the truth & Herodias hated him for it.

Herodias had a grudge against him & wanted to put him to death & could not *do so*; for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous & holy man, & he kept him safe. & when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him (Mk 6:19-20).

Herod is holding off his rage-filled wife because he likes John. He's puzzled by John but likes him. He'd probably set him free if he could, but his wife hated John. Herodias sees an opportunity at Herod's birthday. Like a spider spinning her web, she sends her daughter to dance salaciously which entralls Herod. In his lust, he makes an oath saying, *I'll give you whatever you want*. The

girl goes to her mom & inquires, *What should I ask for?* Her mom answers, *The head of John the Baptist.* Her daughter hurries back with that request. Herod was dismayed, but because of his oath & guests, he couldn't refuse her & lose face. So he had John killed & his head brought in on a platter. That part is clear. But how was it written in Scripture that that would happen? You get a few vss in Malachi about John the Baptist & there's nothing there about any suffering for him at all. There are no spoken prophecies in the OT about the forerunner of the Messiah suffering. So what does it mean **just as it is written of him**? There's no prophecy that the Elijah to come would suffer & die, but Jesus said it was written. Was Jesus wrong? Of course not. Here's my answer: John the Baptist lived in the spirit & power of Elijah. Who was Elijah's nemesis? Jezebel, King Ahab's wife. Ahab was much like Herod, a vacillating & weak puppet of his scheming wife. Herodias is like Jezebel. But Herodias got what she wanted & Jezebel didn't. When Jezebel heard what Elijah had done on Mount Carmel & how he'd killed her prophets of Baal, she said, **may the gods do to me & even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time** (1 Kgs 19:2). She's not a woman of idol threats. She wants to kill Elijah. What does Elijah do? He ran for his life. God speaks to him & gives him some things to do, including anointing Elisha as his successor. Then he's taken up to heaven. God rescued Elijah from Jezebel. She didn't get what she wanted but Herodias did get what she wanted. God didn't rescue John the Baptist from her. The spirit of Jezebel lived on in Herodias & she manipulated her husband to do what she wanted & they were able to kill John, the forerunner of the Messiah. Perhaps Jezebel & Elijah is an acted out prophecy of sorts. Every OT animal sacrifice is a type of prophecy acted out pointing to Jesus' sacrifice. I think that's what this prophecy was. This was written & acted out in the time of Elijah but with a change: Elijah was rescued but John wasn't. They did to John whatever they wanted, **just as it is written of him** (Mk 9:13).

How do we apply this passage to our lives today? In it we see again the necessity of Jesus' death & resurrection. Have you embraced by faith the death of Jesus for your sin? Not, did you make a decision or pray a prayer but have you made the truth your own that you're worthy of eternal torment because of your selfishness, pride, mean-spirited speech, evil thoughts, defiant choices,

& sinful desires. Have you appropriated by faith that in His mercy, Jesus suffered all this for you? Have you turned to Jesus in such a way as to demonstrate you've repented & turned from your sin & depend on Him by faith alone? Have you exchanged all that you are for all that He is? If not, do so today. Jesus' mission to go to the cross proves He loves us. He died so we can be forgiven. Jesus paid the price to rescue us from our sins & He calls us to be willing to pay the same price, to be willing to deny ourselves, pick up our cross, & follow Him (Mk 8:34). Paul writes in 2 Cor 5:14-15, **For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; & He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died & rose again on their behalf.** Is that you? Are you living for Jesus **who died & rose again on your behalf?** What was the cost to Elijah to tell the truth about Baal worship? Jezebel wanted to kill him. What was the cost to John the Baptist to tell the truth about marriage, morality, & repentance? It cost him his head. What was the cost to Jesus for our sins? His blood. What was the cost of the disciples to take the gospel to the ends of the earth? They would be hated, despised, & rejected like He was. What's going to be the cost to us? It will cost you something & you may have to suffer. But it is worth it all.

Communion – Jesus is trying to get His disciples to understand that the cross is why He came. He came to die. After He completes His mission to die then the glory will come. We tend to stumble as the disciples did. We tend to underestimate how much we need Jesus to drink the cup of God's wrath for us. We underestimate our sins. We think they're no big deal. We need to go again & again to the cross. Even if we've been Christians for years, go again to the cross & say, *That's what it took to save a sinner like me, the blood of the Messiah shed from me.* That should have a withering effect on our temptations & sins & cause us to love, serve, & obey Jesus all the more. As the elements are passed meditate on the cost of your salvation; think of the blood that was shed to make you fit for His glorious kingdom. Let's pray. MEN COME

The OT repeatedly spoke of the Messiah's death for us. That's what we remember as we do as Jesus commanded & eat of the bread & drink of the cup in remembrance of His death for us. Ps 22 says,

Many bulls have surrounded me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me. They open wide their mouth at me, As a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws; And You lay me in the dust of death (Ps 22:12-15).

As we remember our Savior's death for us, let us with thanksgiving eat of the bread knowing that Jesus completed His mission to save us. BREAD

The prophet Isaiah writes,

the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; If He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering... Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors (Isaiah 53:10, 12).

As we drink of the cup we remember that Jesus gave Himself as a guilt offering in our place, bearing our sins, & providing us with the salvation that we could never achieve on our own. CUP