



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 9:1-13

"The Transfiguration"

Mark 9

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our passage is Mark 9 and we'll look this morning at verses 1 through 13.

And He was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." Six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John and brought them up to 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 conversing with Jesus. Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here, and let us make three tabernacles, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." For he did not know what to answer 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." All at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore except Jesus alone. And 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 should rise from the dead. They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead might mean. And they began questioning Him, saying, "Why is it that the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" And He said to them, "Elijah does first come and restore everything. And yet how is it

written of the Son of man that He should 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 wished, just as it was written of him."

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Gracious Heavenly Father, we begin with praise and thanksgiving to you, praise as our Creator, as our Savior, as the one who from the foundation of the earth chose a people for Himself and then in time sent His son to redeem them. And over the course of the generations, you have gathered them to yourself through the effectual working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men. We praise you for that because it's your work. We thank you for it because it's not something we deserve nor could we earn nor could we achieve of ourselves but it is something that you have given to us.

Thank you, Father, for the gift of life in your Son, a gift that we have now and a gift that we will have for eternity, and with it we have the Holy Spirit who is our teacher and our instructor the anointing who gives us an understanding of all things. And we pray that as we open the Scriptures together this morning and consider this great momentous event in the ministry of our Lord that displayed His glory to the disciples, may we gain some sense of that significance and may it have its effect upon us in the way that it affected Peter and the others. That's your work, Father, within us. We can't achieve that of ourselves, and so we look to you to teach us and instruct us and prepare us for the week to come.

We pray not only that you would instruct us, we pray that you would bless those who have many needs and we remember them. We think of the number of names that have been put before us from those who have requested prayer. From those who are sick, we pray that you give them healing, pray that you give them encouragement. We recognize that it's not your Will to heal everyone but you do heal, and we pray that if that be your Will, you might so move upon those who

are in physical need and pray that you'd give encouragement to all. We pray that you'd give them the settled conviction that all things come about by your Will, and you work all things to your glory.

You're in control and nothing touches our lives that is not ultimately for our good. And in the end, all will bring glory to you and we ourselves will enter into that glory. So we pray that you'd give comfort to those in need, physically who are in need, those who spiritually and emotionally are in need due to various problems, and pray that you might calm them and give them the assurance of your care, rest in the assurance that our Savior is at your right hand interceding for us. We thank you, Father, for those great truths and we pray for those in need and we pray also in a more general sense for our nation as a whole. We pray for its leaders. We pray that you'd give them wisdom.

We pray that you would give them the sense of their need in light of the great task before them and help them sense that they are not adequate for it, and in that way perhaps, Father, they might come to you. We pray that you would accomplish that if you so will. But we pray for this land and pray that the leaders would be given wisdom and that we might dwell in peace and in this time of peace our church might prosper and grow, not only in this location but throughout the land and throughout the world.

Wherever the Word of God is being preached this morning, Father, may you bless those who teach it that they would teach it in the power of the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit would move among your people to open their hearts to receive the truth. Bless us with a deeper understanding of yourself, a deeper understanding of your Son and the grace that we have received in Him. Bless us now, Father, as we sing our final hymn. Prepare our hearts for this time together. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] I'm sure everyone here or most everyone here is familiar with the name Mark Twain. We know him because we've read his books, *Tom Sawyer* or *Huckleberry Finn* and if not, we're familiar

with him because he's one of the best known, best loved of America's storytellers. And perhaps you're aware that he was no Christian. In fact, he was an avowed skeptic and critic of the faith. Nevertheless, he wrote a book that offers, I think, something of an illustration of our Lord's life. The book is *The Prince and the Pauper*, which, of all his books, was his daughter's favorite and one I'm sure you're familiar with.

It's the fictitious tale of Edward VI who, as the young Prince of Wales, trades places in life with a poor boy named Tom Canty. After a chance meeting, they discover to their surprise that they were identical in appearance, so the prince, who was longing to experience the fun and the freedom of boys outside of the rigid life of the court, puts off his silks and satins and puts on the rags of the pauper and leaves the charm and splendor of the palace. But no sooner does he step outside than he is treated like a pauper. He's beaten and mocked by the guards and laughed at by the crowds when he protests that he's the prince, then driven into the streets and the squalor of London. He was the prince. He was the Prince of Wales, but all the people could see was a boy in the dirty, worn clothes of a pauper.

Now, in a sense, that illustrates what occurred in our Lord's incarnation. He is the eternal Son of God, Messiah, the Prince, as Daniel calls Him, who clothed Himself in the rags of fallen humanity in order to enter this world and give His life a ransom for many. In doing that, He lost none of His deity. He continued to be the Son of God, the King of kings, but all of that was veiled in His human nature. As a result, He appeared as an ordinary man, and evidently not a very attractive man. According to Isaiah, He had no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him. In fact, Isaiah compares Him to a root out of dry ground.

It's not an attractive appearance. Not the appearance we might expect the Son of God to take, but that's how He entered the world, and as we come to this midsection of Mark's gospel and the middle of our Lord's ministry, this matter of His real identity was the focus of

his interest. The Lord and his disciples have traveled to the far north, to Caesarea Philippi on the slopes of Mount Hermon on the border of Lebanon, and there He asked the disciples the question, "Who do people say that I am?" They gave a variety of answers. John the Baptist, one of the prophets, Elijah – all answers that were in a sense noble, complimentary answers and yet each falling far short of the correct one.

The people just couldn't see beyond the outer appearance to the real identity. They couldn't see the king through the servant. But Peter did when he confessed, "Thou art the Christ. Thou art the King." That was revealed to him by the Father, as our Lord says, and the Lord Himself affirms it by identifying Himself as the Son of man, the heavenly man of Daniel 7, the King who comes in the clouds to the Ancient of Days and receives from Him glory and dominion and a kingdom. And yet to look at Him, you wouldn't think so. There's no glory. He had the appearance of a simple Jewish carpenter, so to confess Jesus as the Christ was a confession of faith, it was not a confession of sight.

And then the Lord proceeds to shake their faith by describing His rejection and His death, referring to the cross, and not only a cross for Himself but a cross for them as well. He says, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Now, they weren't expecting that. They had confessed Jesus to be the Christ anticipating a kingdom and then they are promised a cross. They must have wondered, "What about the kingdom? And the glory? All that we've been looking for, all that we've been anticipating in Him?" Now, there was genuine faith in these men and they had made a true confession of faith, but there was also confusion in their minds.

And so to encourage them and confirm their faith and confirm the truth of the confession that they had made, the Lord gives them a promise in verse 1 of chapter 9 that some of them standing with him would not taste death until they saw the kingdom of God after it had

come in glory. That promise is one that critics have seized on to claim that the Bible is not true, the Bible has mistakes, all the disciples are dead, and Christ has not come and his kingdom; therefore, that prophecy failed. But a careful reading of the text makes it clear from the close connection between the promise that's given in verse 1 and the events in verse 2 that the fulfillment of that promise occurred six days later when Peter, James, and John saw the glory of Christ unveiled on the mountain and the power of His kingdom in the transfiguration.

As one writer puts it, "The transfiguration was nothing more nor less than the Lord God Almighty reaching out and lifting the curtain, saying, 'Though the road just ahead will be hard, this is the way things are going to be at the Second Coming.'" Mark writes in verse 2 that six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. Most likely, this is Mount Hermon, which is the tallest of the mountains in that region, stands some 9,000 feet, snow-capped peaks on it. And evidently the events that unfold before us occurred at night.

Luke tells us that the Lord was praying, and it was often His custom to pray at night. And also, His disciples were sleeping. So that was the situation when suddenly they're awakened when the mountain began to blaze with light. They saw the Lord, Mark writes in verse 2, transfigured before them, and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white as no launderer on earth can whiten them. Now, you get the picture of something very white and bright in that statement but that really is almost an understatement when you compare the description that's given by the other gospel writers, Matthew and Luke.

Matthew writes, "His face shone like the sun and His garments became as white as light." Luke states that His clothing became white and gleaming, which can mean something like flashing out. The picture seems to be something of lightning flashing out from His garments. The variety of descriptions that are given of this event

suggests that it was a sight that was almost too difficult to describe, that defies description. They couldn't really find the words for it. But the words they do give us and the description that we have makes it clear that what was revealed on that mountain was heavenly purity. It was divine glory. It was holy, unearthly, and made all the more dazzling against the night sky. So on a high mountain against the dark of night, the disciples witnessed a spectacular unveiling of the Lord's glory in the transfiguration.

R. A. Cole, who has written a commentary on the gospel of Mark writes: "In a sense, we do wrong to call this the transfiguration as though it were unique. The true transfiguration had been at Bethlehem." And really, that's true. What the disciples were allowed to see was the Lord's eternal glory, which was His with the Father before the world began. That's what He says in John 17. They were given a glimpse of what the author of Hebrews describes as the radiance of His glory, the effulgence of His glory, the Shekinah glory of the Old Testament.

So as they're witnessing this magnificent display of glory, we read in verse 4 that He was joined by two of the most eminent figures of the Old Testament, Elijah and Moses, who were conversing with Him. Why Moses and Elijah? we might wonder. Why do they appear with our Lord rather than, say, Abraham and Isaiah? Or Adam and Noah or Samuel and David? Well, it may have something to do with the mysterious way in which their lives ended. Lots of speculation on why these two men might have appeared, but if you're familiar with the lives of those two men, you know that their lives did end in a mysterious way, and that would lend some appropriateness to their appearing with Him in this mysterious way on the mountain.

Moses died but his body was buried by the Lord Himself and no one knew where that body was laid to rest, and Elijah, as you remember, never died but he was translated from earth to heaven in the chariot of fire, so perhaps this mysterious departure from the earth with both of these men has something to do with it. Probably,

however, their appearance is to be understood in light of the Lord's mission. He came as He declares in Matthew 5:17 to fulfill the law and the prophets, and Moses and Elijah are representative of both of these. Moses is the great law giver. We think of the law given at Mount Sinai, we think of Moses, and Elijah was one of the greatest of the prophets who held at this particular time a very special place in the minds of the Jews.

So the appearance of these two indicated that the fulfillment of our Lord's mission had arrived. He would fulfill the law and the prophets through His life and through His death. He would live a perfect life, He would fulfill all of those prophecies that had been given about His first coming, and then He would fulfill them, particularly all of the prophecies about His death, all of the allusions to it in the sacrifices that were so central to Israel's religion in His death, which happens to be the subject of the conversation that they were having among themselves. Mark doesn't record a conversation but Luke does write that they were speaking of His departure. Literally, His exodus, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

That's a reference to His death, His exodus, and an exodus far greater than the one that Moses led out of Egypt because when the Lord made His exodus at the cross, He drew with Him a whole host of people, not just one nation as with Moses but some from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, not just Jewish people but Jews and Gentiles alike. All who believe in Him were brought out of Satan's domain at the cross. That is where the deliverance was accomplished. That's where our release was obtained for us, at the cross. It becomes a reality in time as we put our faith in Him and we join ourselves to Jesus Christ. That's when we appropriate that release, but it was settled, finished, accomplished at the cross.

There, we were delivered from sin's penalty and power and there we were delivered from the judgment of God. But the Lord had told the disciples earlier in the week that the Son of man must suffer many things and be rejected and be killed. It's the very thing that they were

talking about on the mountain, and it's confirmed by that conversation by these two great witnesses, the representatives of the law and the prophets. So you have the whole Old Testament, as it were, converging on that statement and confirming it to be true, so what Peter had denied with his rebuke of the Lord when he gave that announcement six days earlier, Moses and Elijah now confirm.

Well, you might think that Peter would have learned his lesson six days earlier, and if he hadn't learned it from the rebuke that the Lord gave him then, he would have learned it from what he saw before him and the conversation that was taking place. But no, true to his impulsive nature, Peter responds by saying in verse 5, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here, and let us make three tabernacles, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." How would he recognize that this was Moses and Elijah that were with the Lord? We're not told. Perhaps it was something about their appearance that gave him that understanding.

Perhaps something was said in the conversation or perhaps the Lord simply impressed it immediately upon his mind, he had an intuitive understanding of that. However it occurred, he did recognize them. He was overwhelmed by the spectacle, and in his amazement, he proposed building three shelters, three tabernacles, which, if you're not familiar with what a tabernacle is, at least the kind that he was referring to, it was a small booth made of branches and leaves that would give a person some shelter from the sun. Things the Jews would build – in fact, still do build – to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

So he's proposing to build some of these for them, but it was a suggestion that was really not well thought out. What would heavenly beings need with shelter from the elements? And he evidently had not given much to that. But his mistake was far more serious than a mere lapse in logic. It was a lapse in faith and showed that he had misunderstood the whole event that had unfolded before him. Awed by the glory of the King and the glory of the kingdom, he didn't want

it to end. And he failed to realize that it was a momentary anticipation of the future kingdom.

It was only a preview of Christ's future triumph and glory. And so he wanted to stay on the mountain, he wanted to keep the glory there, thinking that the kingdom had come. And I suppose you can understand that. It was a blissful moment. Perhaps the words that were given really don't describe it fully. We could not really get a sense of what it was like unless we were there. It must have been an incredibly wonderful experience to be there and, of course, if we were there, would we want it to end, either? I don't think so. We would enjoy it immensely and want it to keep going on.

And so he didn't want it to end, he didn't want to go down the mountain to the toil in the world below where the cross was waiting. As I say, it's understandable but it showed that Peter still didn't understand that the cross was a necessity if the kingdom was to come.

Klaas Schilder, Dutch writer of a generation ago, in his three-volume work on Christ's sufferings, trial, and crucifixion, entitled this verse "Satan on the Mount of Transfiguration" and it's an appropriate title because Peter's request to build tabernacles was essentially the rebuke that he had given six days earlier when he denounced the Lord's announcement of the cross with the words "God forbid it, Lord." And as our Lord responded, that statement by Peter was a statement inspired by the devil himself. He says, "Get behind me, Satan." And here again, Peter was tempting the Lord to turn away from the cross – unwittingly, no doubt, because in verse 6, Mark informs us that they were terrified. They didn't know what to say and they were speaking – or he was speaking, rather, out of fear.

But still, his response to the transfiguration showed that the Lord's statement that He must suffer and be killed had not yet registered with Peter. What had registered with him was the Lord's promise of glory to come, and he was anxious to find the fulfillment of that future glory in the glory that had unfolded before him. And so he makes this proposal to build the tabernacles but his proposal was

answered again by a rebuke, and this time from God the Father Himself who spoke out of a cloud that had formed around Jesus and Moses and Elijah, and from that cloud God said, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him." Now, that was precisely Peter's problem.

He hadn't been listening to Him, and I would suggest that that's precisely our problem when we have various difficulties in life. I'm not speaking of the difficulties that are inevitable, that are just part of being in this fallen world of sickness and various problems such as that, but we do bring many problems upon ourselves, and when we do, I think fundamentally it's because we don't listen to Christ. Christ has spoken. Really, He has spoken in all 66 books of the Bible, the whole Bible is the Word of God, it's the Word of Christ, and He's spoken very broadly to all of our conditions and all of our situations, and we're to listen to Him. But specifically to our context, He has spoken to the very essence of the gospel, which is His death.

Peter hadn't been listening to that. He'd heard it. It had been spoken very plainly to him, but he continued to look for the crown without the cross, and that cannot be. We went over this to some degree and some detail last week, but we touch on it again this week because again it's the underlying problem with Peter and the apostles. They didn't understand the necessity of the cross, but we see that throughout our Lord's teaching, throughout the teaching of the New Testament. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6, "No one shall inherit the kingdom of God who has not been washed, who has not been sanctified, who has not been justified," and that occurs only by virtue of the blood of Jesus Christ.

And we appropriate that, we enter into the reality of that, we enter into the blessings of that cross through faith alone. And so Peter needed to listen to what the Lord would say on this, and He would say much more because as He moves down the mountain, the whole progress of this book of Mark is movement toward Jerusalem, movement toward the cross, which was necessary if the kingdom were to come. So he's to listen to Him, all that He would teach on this,

because without understanding the necessity of the cross, a person cannot understand the person and work of our Lord and cannot worship Him and certainly cannot serve Him. No doubt Peter thought he was doing that. After all, he wanted to serve the Lord, didn't he? He wanted to build tabernacles for Him and his visitors.

It showed that he had a real zeal for the Lord, but it was a zeal without knowledge. And that in the end is always harmful. Peter had been selective in what he had listened to. He'd heard some of what the Lord had said and he had a belief in him, and it was a true belief, but he hadn't listened enough. And for love to be intelligent and for zeal to be profitable, we must listen to all Christ has to say.

Michael Horton is a perceptive young writer who you may be familiar with. He gained some acclaim from the book, *The Agony of Deceit*, which he edited. It got some very good write-ups in *Time* and *Newsweek* – I think both of them, if I'm not mistaken. In a more recent book which he has written, *Made in America: The Shaping of Modern American Evangelicalism*, he takes a penetrating look at the contemporary evangelical church. One of his sharpest criticisms is for the deliberate disregard for doctrine among many Bible-believing churches, and he makes a very interesting comment.

He writes, "Today the World Council of Churches tells us doctrine divides, service unites. And yet, a top-level official of that body told me that the council had come to recognize the opposite. 'When you actually get out there on the field,'" this particular official told him, "'you realize that it's doctrine that unites.'" Now, that's very interesting and ironical that someone of that organization would say that because historically, the evangelical church has stood exactly for that. A whole reason for our being has been, at least in large part, our dedication to doctrine, and yet now, some of those who have been indifferent or in opposition to that are coming to an understanding of it while the church is drifting away from it. That's a crucial error, a fatal error.

Knowledge about the one we serve is crucial if we're to really serve Him, and when we speak about knowledge about Him, we're speaking about doctrine, we're speaking about the truth of Scripture. If we're to serve Him, we must know about Him. To really know Him, we must know about Him. And Peter was trying to serve Christ in ignorance, and his service was actually a sin. He needed to listen to Christ because there can be no service, there can be no salvation otherwise. Peter needed to do that, all of the disciples needed to do that, and of course it follows that they should listen to Him because of who He is. He is God's beloved Son, the eternal second person of the Trinity, and that statement by God Himself is the final definitive answer to all inquiries into the identity of Jesus.

Who do men say that He is? Well, they say a variety of things. They say He's John, raised from the dead; He's Elijah, revived from the dead; He's one of the prophets; He's a great moral teacher; He's a great example for all of us. Numerous examples that men can give to that question, but God settles the matter. God Himself settles it with this great declaration, "This is my beloved Son." Notice what He doesn't say. He doesn't say, "And these are my faithful witnesses with Him. Listen to them as well." He could have said that and that would have been a true statement and a true exhortation but He doesn't, He doesn't mention them. Moses and Elijah don't figure into this at all. He doesn't mention them.

He speaks only of Jesus because He is unique. He is not in a class with them. He's in a class all of His own. He is the Son of God, the Son of man, He is the God-man. The one and the only one who reconciles men to God, who propitiates God, who satisfies His justice and turns away His wrath. He's the one on whom their whole destiny hangs, and so they were to listen to Him. Not only what He had to say about the cross, though fundamentally that, but all that He had to say and what He had to say about their cross as well. They were to prepare themselves to descend the mountain, return to the hardships of

the world below, prepare themselves to deny themselves, take up their crosses, and follow Him.

Well, it was a glorious, informative event that they witnessed but then it ends. We read in verse 8: And all at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore except Jesus only. Jesus only. That fact in itself says a great deal. He remained there alone because His work was not yet finished. He was still on His way to Jerusalem, still on His way to the cross. He could not return to His Father, return to the glory of heaven, which He had left, until His mission was finished. And so they leave, Moses and Elijah, but our Lord remains. But also, what that tells us is that the prophets disappeared because their significance is only to point to Jesus to reveal Him, to witness to Him, and when that is finished, they cease to be significant.

Now, they are significant men, they had a significant ministry, but their significance is found in Christ and their whole purpose was to point to Him, and having done that, they cease ultimately to be of significance. As John the Baptist said, "He must increase but I must decrease." Christ is central. He is the central figure of history. He is to be the central figure of our life. He is the central figure of our life and we are to recognize that. So we must also be saying and be living the truth of John's statements. He must increase but I must decrease.

Is that true in your life? I think we all need to ask ourselves that questions continually and examine ourselves in light of that. We are to live our lives in such a way that He is the focus of it. And that is the only way that we're going to have successful Christian lives, is if we look to Him continually. That's what the author of Hebrews tells us to do. He gives that great list of men and women of the faith in chapter 11 and then he exhorts his readers: Looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.

We look to Him continually, and as we do, as we get our perspective from Him and we fill our minds with Him, then we are able to deal with the temptations of the world and the flesh and we are

able to deal with all that pulls upon our faith and our lives. We gain our strength from Him, we gain our leading from Him. We are to continually be looking to Him and in so doing, denying ourselves and following Him.

So again, the glory is gone and the three disciples were alone with Jesus, who was, once again, clothed in the rags of human nature though He remains the Son of God and the King of kings. And they'd learned that, they'd learned that behind the appearance, there is the great glory of the second person of the Trinity. They'd learned a great lesson from what they'd seen. They'd had a truth, a conviction in their mind confirmed in it but they'd learned a great lesson in that and particularly Peter. For the second time, he'd played Satan and he'd been rebuked, so you might wonder as you think about that, why did the Lord take Peter along with Him? He knew what was going to happen. He knew the kind of person that Peter was. Why'd He take him?

Why wasn't Andrew chosen instead? After all, it was Andrew who brought Peter to the Lord. That would seem to commend him somewhat. Why James? He died very early in the apostolic age. He's one of the first martyrs of the church. Perhaps we can understand why John was chosen. He lived to be an old man, he had a great ministry, wrote the fourth gospel, wrote three epistles, wrote the book of Revelation, ministered extensively in Jerusalem and had a very significant ministry in Ephesus. We can understand perhaps why He would bring John but why James? He didn't write a book. We know very little about him. In fact, why just three? It was a magnificent revelation, it was a great privilege, and so we might wonder, why not all of the disciples? We'd maybe leave Judas out but the other 11 ought to brought, shouldn't they?

Why three? And if these three, or if three, why these three? Well, what we can say for sure is it wasn't due to favoritism on the part of our Lord nor due to any merit on the part of the disciples. It was an example of grace. Whatever the practical reasons for it are,

we're not told. They are sealed up in the mind of God, for that matter, but what I think we can say very clearly is these men were selected because it pleased the Lord to choose them. Why do any of us have the great privilege of knowing the Lord? Why is it that we have been made partakers of Christ's glory and the revelation of Him? Why do you know who Christ is? Know about the glory of Christ?

Why is He important to you? And you have a desire to know Him better? Whereas others outside of the church have absolutely no true understanding of Him, no real interest in Him at all. Well, it's certainly not due to any merit on our part. It's due to the sovereign grace of God and His unsearchable choice of us. Why, we can't say, but we can praise Him and thank Him for the choice that He's made, and I think that perhaps we have in this selection of these men an illustration of that very fact, of the sovereign grace of God.

Now, you can imagine with what excitement the experience must have left them and the next day as they were making their way down the mountain and asking the Lord questions and discussing among themselves the things they had seen with great excitement, the Lord then interrupts them and gave them strict orders to tell no one of what they had witnessed. He knew that such talk would spread very quickly and it would fuel the popular ideas about His Messiahship and the fervor for it that was misguided, and so He wanted to avoid that and instructs them to say nothing about this until after the resurrection when they themselves would have a better understanding of it.

But talk of the resurrection, of His being raised from the dead, only puzzled the disciples more and raised questions, and verse 10 states that they began discussing among themselves what that might mean. They knew about the general resurrection at the end of the age. They had a belief in that but a special resurrection of the Son of man, of the Messiah, that puzzled them. There was still this confusion about Christ's sufferings and His dying. One thing that bothered them was that His death, to their minds at least, didn't seem to fit with some

prophecies about the Messiah, particularly in terms of Malachi – or rather in terms of Elijah as recorded in Malachi 4:5-6.

It concludes the Old Testament and there we read: God says, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers." Must have been thinking if Elijah comes and does his preparatory work and restores the hearts of the people, how is it that the Messiah is rejected and killed? If their hearts have been restored and that precedes His coming, how does this happen? How is he killed? And so they ask in verse 11: Why is it that the scribes say that first Elijah must come? How does that fit with the sufferings and the death that you've been speaking about?

And the Lord answers in verse 12: Both are true because both are prophesied. Elijah does first come but it's also written of the Son of man that He should suffer many things and be treated with contempt. Most likely he's referring in that to the prophecy of Isaiah 53, possibly also Zechariah 13:7, Psalm 22. Then in verse 13, He puts it all together. "But I say to you Elijah has indeed come," referring to John the Baptist. They understood that. Matthew makes that clear in his account of this event. John was Elijah in that he functioned as Elijah. He did the things that Elijah would have done. And their ministries, if you follow them and compare them with one another, they parallel one another very closely.

Now, that doesn't preclude a future ministry of Elijah, which Malachi seems to teach and which Revelation 11 seems to describe in the two witnesses there in verse 6. We don't have time to explore that but that does seem to be the prophecy of Malachi. But the Lord's point here is that that's no obstacle to His sufferings and death. John's ministry carried out much of that preparatory ministry that Elijah would carry out and the cross is clearly set forth in Scripture. So regardless of the apparent difficulties that they were having with such

a prophecy, they were still to believe it. The Scriptures make it very clear.

And so like Mary, the disciples would treasure all these things in their heart until the resurrection when they had a fuller understanding of them and then they would make them known to others. But what they'd witnessed in the mountain with the transfiguration was still a great encouragement to them at that moment. It would become an even greater encouragement to them in the future. Encouragement to their faith, a confirmation that the confession of faith was true. It was a confirmation that the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, is true because they see in Him the glory that was hidden behind the curtain of His flesh.

They were able to witness all of that and see the person of His true identity, and in seeing that, see what would be revealed in the future when, as He says at the end of chapter 8, He comes in the glory of the Father with the holy angels. That is when He would bring the kingdom that they were anticipating. And the transfiguration foreshadowed that kingdom, and the Lord had promised that some of them would see it and they did. They saw it in its power.

And that informs us, I think, of something of the nature of the kingdom that we're looking forward to. It comes down to earth. They see this on the mountain, they see it on the earth, and so it will be an earthly kingdom, a kingdom of purity, of heavenly purity, a kingdom of power and glory, and it will be composed of God's redeemed of all the ages. The Old Testament saint and the New Testament saint. We can broaden that to say the Jew and the Gentile alike will inhabit this kingdom and rule and reign with Jesus Christ as the King.

Well, as I said, this was a great encouragement to their faith and Peter makes that very point in 2 Peter chapter 1, and there in verses 16 through 19, he writes: For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as

this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased," and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

So he's referring there to the Mount of Transfiguration, this event that we have been studying. And then he adds: "And so we have the prophetic word made more sure." A transfiguration made more sure, the prophetic word, the hope Peter had in a kingdom to come did not rest in fables but Scripture that was confirmed in his experience. And so when the men of Peter's day would laugh at him for declaring that Jesus is the Christ, perhaps say things like, "What do you mean the Christ? The King? What kind of king is he? He was crucified. What kind of king is it that is defeated by the Romans? Where is He now? Where is His kingdom? All we see is Roman soldiers around us and their banners."

Well, as Peter heard that kind of ridicule and rejection, he could remember the glory that he had seen revealed to him in the transfiguration, and when they'd scoff at His second coming with the question, "Where's the promise of His coming?" Things continue today just as they have for centuries, just as they have for millennia. What reason do we have for thinking they're going to change? Well, Peter could look to the north, he could look to that mountain and remember what he had seen there and know that the prophetic word is "sure" and we can do the same. The transfiguration should also be a great encouragement to us. Not only because it confirms the great prophecies of the Old Testament but because it illustrates and anticipates our own experience, both now and in the future.

The glory of Christ unveiled on the mountain is the glory that you and I, all people who have put their faith in Christ, will share with him. That's Paul's statement in a variety of places but he writes in Philippians 3:21 that when He comes, the body of our humble state will be transformed into conformity with the body of His glory, so what we see flashing forth on that mount is what's going to characterize us as well. Colossians 3:4, when Christ who is our life is

revealed, then you also will be with Him in glory. For all believers in Jesus Christ, that's our certain future.

That's the end, that's the goal of this present pilgrimage that we are on as disciples and which we are carrying our cross, and it should remind us of how inconsequential are the tribulations of this life when compared to the glory that is to be revealed to us. But glory is not only future, it's present. It's our experience now. The Greek word that's used in verse 2 for our Lord being transfigured is the word "metamorphoo," the word from which we get metamorphosis. And it's the same word that's used in 2 Corinthians 3:18 where Paul describes what is presently happening in the Christian in the work of sanctification.

He writes: But all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord – that is, as we are studying the Scriptures, as we're reading our Bibles, and we're seeing Christ and seeing His glory – are being transformed, are being transfigured, presently progressively being changed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord the Spirit. Now, that happens as we see Him in the Scriptures, and so drawing on the exhortation of God, the command of God, to Peter and the disciples when He spoke from the cloud, as we listen to Him as He speaks to us from His Word, from the Bible, we are being changed. Presently. It's a present reality.

It's presently happening. The Holy Spirit effects a genuine transformation in the inner man as we read the Scriptures. It's incentive for us to be students of the Bible, to know the Word of God. It does have an actual effect upon us. We become like Christ. We have His image, we represent Him.

Now, I doubt that Mark Twain understood any of that when he wrote his book, *The Prince and the Pauper*. He began the book by saying, "It may have happened; it may not have happened – but it could have happened." Perhaps. But what did happen with our Lord when He laid aside the glories of heaven and put on the rags of His human nature is far greater than any storyteller or man could imagine.

Christ, the King of kings, emptied Himself, as Paul tells us in Philippians 2. Doesn't mean He emptied any of His deity. Continued to be the eternal Son of God, clothed in His human nature, but He emptied Himself of His heavenly prerogatives and privileges. Taking the form of a bond-servant and being made in the likeness of men, humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

That death is the basis of His resurrection, His exaltation, the basis of our transformation, our transfiguration, the basis of the future kingdom. But only those who know Him will enter into that kingdom. Only the friends of the King will inherit the kingdom.

Do you know Him? If you don't, you can come to know Him by listening to Him. He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me." Listen to Him. Believe His words. Entrust your soul to His eternal care. Trust that his death counts for you and receive the forgiveness of sins and receive life everlasting. May God help you to do that, to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for that glimpse you gave the disciples into the glory of your Son, one that stayed with them, one that they never forgot, one that was a great encouragement, as Peter testifies. And may it be so for us as well. It is a glimpse into the glory of your Son and the kingdom that He will bring upon the earth, the glory that we will share with Him, not because it's ours by nature – it's not, it's His by nature. It's His eternal glory. But He imparts it to us and we thank you for that and look forward to that and pray that our lives would be lived in anticipation of it.

And as we anticipate it, may we live lives of obedient service in this day and age and look to Christ, experience that transformation in our own lives, moving from glory to glory as the Spirit changes us. We pray that you'd set these desires within our heart and give us the discipline and the diligence to live life in that way. We thank you for

Christ, for the life that is ours in Him, for the kingdom that is coming.

It's in His name we pray. Amen.