

I. Introduction

Open up to Mark 9:2.

A. Story: First week working at church. Junior High Director. Service week. Small church in West Modesto. Introduced myself with my title. Senior Pastor of that church just said, "Well, I'm the chief dishwasher and floor sweeper. Welcome to our church, make yourself at home and if there's anything you need, just let me know."

1. ***Having** power and title is one kind of leadership, not hard to find in our world.
2. ***But Having** power and knowing **when** to use it and even being willing to lay it down for the good of others, that is a completely different and revolutionary kind of leadership.

B. In our passage today, we're going to see two seemingly contrasting realities about Jesus: His unparalleled greatness and His intent to suffer and die.

1. Sometimes contrasts point out a contradiction. But sometimes the seeming contradiction forces us to redefine.
2. In showing the disciples this amazing glimpse of His true identity, Jesus will continue to redefine the true meaning of Kingship, ruling and being powerful.

C. So that you can get every ounce of meaning from this passage today, let's do some detective work in the Old Testament.

1. If you want to understand the books of the New Testament, you HAVE TO be acquainted with the content of the Old Testament. (LOTR Illus)
2. So I want to front-load some Old Testament Scripture that Mark is going to do some major hyperlinking back to. It's so brilliant!
3. Exodus 24: I'll read some selected verses for you and highlight some details
- 4.

Then He [God] said to Moses, "Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. ²Moses alone shall come near to the Lord, but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him." (Exodus 24:1-2)

4. So Moses is going to go up onto a **mountain** with some people, **three of whom are specifically named**.

⁹Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu [three people specifically named], and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, ¹⁰**and they saw the God of Israel**. There was under His feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. ¹¹And He did not lay His hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank. (Exodus 24:9-11)

5. Who do the people on this mountain see at the center of this dazzling vision? THE GOD OF ISRAEL in a dazzling display.

¹⁵ Then Moses went up **on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain.** ¹⁶ The glory of the Lord dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it **six days.** And on the seventh day He **called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud.** ¹⁷ Now the appearance of the **glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire** on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. (Exodus 24:15-17)

6. Now the mountain is covered with a cloud. The length of time mentioned specifically is **SIX DAYS.**
7. Then, a voice calls out from the cloud.
8. And the vision of God on top of the mountain is this glorious radiant glow.
9. Directly after this passage in Exodus, God gives Moses instructions for building the **TENT** (called the tabernacle) that the Ark of the Covenant and the **PRESENCE OF GOD.**
10. And I'll throw in one more freebie for fun:

¹⁵ "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to Him you shall listen. (Deuteronomy 18:15)

11. Moses prophesies that God will raise up a prophet that is like Moses in some way.
12. And the command is: **Listen to HIM!**

II. Ok. Now, with those passages and details front-loaded, let's go to Mark 9

A. ² And after **six days** Jesus took with Him **Peter and James and John** [three named men], 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. (Mark 9:2-8)

1. We've got something about six days, and Jesus and three specifically named men go up on a mountain. One of the people on this mountain starts glowing. Moses and Elijah are even there! A cloud covers the place and then a voice speaks out of the cloud, repeating the same message prophesied 1,400 years before to Moses. "Listen to Him!"
2. Why in the world would Mark want to embed so many similar details so that when we read this passage in Mark, we think about the passage in Exodus?
 - a. For one VERY LARGE reason.
 - b. He lines up all these identical details but then right in the middle of it, he pulls a switcheroo, a literary slight of hand.
3. Let me ask you this: In the Exodus passage with Moses on a mountain with three friends, WHO is seen in the middle of this glorious, dazzling, glowing vision? **THE GOD OF ISRAEL.**

4. But here in Mark, with all of these parallel details, WHO is seen in the middle of this glorious, dazzling, glowing vision? **JESUS**.
 5. So in the place we expect to see God show up, who stands in that place? **JESUS**. Mark is unquestionably making a huge claim: **JESUS is the GOD OF ISRAEL**.
 6. Peter is so blown away by this realization that he's speechless! Except for the fact that he starts talking!
 - a. He didn't know what else to say, so in his shock, he reverts back to history.
 - b. Moses, on a mountain, clouds, voice from the cloud ... what comes next??
 - c. Tents! Let's build a tent to house the presence of ... GOD.
 7. The MAIN POINT of the transfiguration story, from Mark's point of view, is to identify Jesus, not only as a promised Messiah, but that this Messiah, Jesus is also GOD.
 - a. This is only reinforced by the fact that the two greatest Old Testament prophets are present and yet Mark doesn't quote anything they say. Then after the voice from the cloud says, "Listen to JESUS", they disappear, never to be seen again.
 - b. The two greatest prophets in the history of Israel are almost treated as scenery in comparison to Jesus.
 - c. It's as if Moses and Elijah show up to hand off the baton to the ULTIMATE Prophet, Priest, and King that we've all been waiting for.
 8. So we have this gigantic revelation of Jesus as the Divine Son of God standing in the place of the God of Israel, the God of the universe. And then Mark records this kind of whiplash conversation coming down the mountain:

B. ⁹And 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. ¹⁰So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean. ¹¹And they asked Him, "Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" ¹²And 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? ¹³But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him." (Mark 9:9-13)
1. A few things are happening here:
 - a. Jesus, once again, brings attention back the fact that He must suffer and die. But, no matter how much Jesus has warned them, the disciples STILL have no concept of the Messiah dying. They're still trying to convince themselves that He's speaking metaphorically.
 - b. The disciples passive-aggressively push back at what Jesus said about dying.
 - 1) "But the scribes say that Elijah must come." They are referring to Malachi 4.
 - a) In Malachi 4, we see this prophecy of the Day of the Lord where all the wicked are smashed and God sets everything right.
 - b) The very last words of this chapter are that Elijah's coming will precede this day and everything will be made right.
 - 2) "So Jesus, if You read Your Bible right, Elijah comes (which he has now!) and then God blows away His enemies and everything is set right forever."

- a) The disciples were falling into a very common error in biblical study” PROOF TEXTING.
 - b) Where we find ONE verse or chapter that seems to reinforce what we already believe and use it to defend the beliefs we already have but we ignore all the OTHER things the Bible also says.
 - c) We let one verse or concept define what we believe while ignoring all the other biblical data that might speak into how we interpret that one verse or chapter. (Mug: “I can do all things through a verse taken out of context.”)
- c. Jesus partly confirms what they’re saying but also pushes back against their proof-texting by asking another question.
- 1) You’re right, an Elijah-like figure comes back first (we see in Matthew that Jesus specifically indicates John the Baptist fulfilling this role) But what about all the stuff the prophets say about the Messiah suffering?
 - 2) “Yes, I’ve read Malachi 4 but have YOU read Isaiah 53? The one about God’s chosen messianic servant **suffering**.”
 - 3) “Yes, John the Baptist came in the same spirit as Elijah calling the people of Israel to repentance. And you think that what’s next is all flowers and rainbows and God reigning on Earth forever.”
 - 4) But what happened to John? Oh yes, they beheaded Him, and He was only the MESSENGER!
2. Why would Jesus work so hard to get His disciples to accept that He must suffer after such a glorious display of divinity? Two reasons come to mind.
- a) Because Jesus is redefining for them what true power really looks like, what it looks like to rule in God’s image.
 - 1) All these men have ever seen of power in this world: domination, force
 - 2) But Jesus, clearly shown here to be the most powerful being in the universe, will willingly accept a beating in place of a victory march. Will willingly accept thorns as His crown. Will willingly hold nails in His hands instead of a scepter. Will willingly occupy a cross as His throne.
 - 3) Jesus’ message to all who would follow Him is to hang on a cross and say, “This is what ruling looks like in My Kingdom. Follow Me.”
 - b) Another reason Jesus would mark this moment of glory with the cross: because in the coming moment, as these three disciples would see Jesus crucified, He didn’t want there to be any confusion WHO exactly was dying for them: The God of the Universe was dying for them, for you.
3. And now, coming down from the mountain, Mark is going to further show us Jesus’ power and identity on display.
- C. ¹⁴ And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. ¹⁵ And immediately all the crowd, when they saw Him, were greatly amazed and ran up to Him and greeted Him. ¹⁶ And He asked them, “What are you arguing about with them?” ¹⁷ And someone from the crowd answered Him, “Teacher, I brought my son to You, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. ¹⁸ And whenever it seizes him, it throws

him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked Your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.”¹⁹ And He answered them, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to Me.” (Mark 9:14-29)

*Jesus’ response here has always baffled me. If you read on we’re going to see Jesus tell the disciples that this kind of demon only comes out by prayer, so why is He so frustrated with them? We’ll get to that. But on the surface, it feels a bit unfair.

*Either way, the drama builds and the pressure is on—will He or won’t He be able to cast a demon out that His disciples couldn’t? Remember, it was Jesus Who GAVE them the authority to cast out demons.

²⁰ And they brought the boy to Him. And when the spirit saw Him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. ²¹ And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. ²² And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him.

*Just feel this for a moment. This demon is assaulting and threatening the life of a child. This is how evil our enemy is. And the father says:

But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”²³ And Jesus said to him, “If you can! All things are possible for one who believes.”

*This is not a generic proclamation of the Disney-esque “power of belief.”

*Notice WHO is at the center of this question: “Jesus if YOU can do anything. So when Jesus says all things are possible for one who believes, the context is, “One who believes in ME.”

²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!”

1. “Jesus, part of me believes, the other part doesn’t, but the part that doesn’t trust You—I trust you to fix that part!”
 - a) The presence of doubt does not indicate an absence of faith. Right here, in the Gospel of Mark we clearly see that faith and doubt will often co-exist.
 - b) But the faith that is there will lead us to ask for more and in ways we don’t yet trust God.
 - c) And did you notice that even with this man’s imperfect faith, Jesus is still willing to act! It’s enough. This is so encouraging.

²⁵ And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” ²⁶ And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, “He is dead.” ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. ²⁸ And when He had entered the house, His disciples asked Him

privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁹ And He said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."

2. Did you catch what Mark just did to us? Leaves us hanging with Jesus' last words?
"This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."
 - a) The thoughtful reader will say, "Yes, but Jesus YOU didn't pray."
 - b) And Jesus' silent reply is "You're right. I'm the one you pray TO. I'm the one who has authority to ANSWER prayers."
 - c) Jesus isn't just a good man. He isn't even just a prophet. Jesus isn't just a man, specially gifted by God. Jesus IS God. That is what Mark is proving here. A demon that can only be cast out by prayer from humans is cast out directly by Jesus. Jesus has the authority to **do** what everyone else can only **ask** for.
 - d) And yet this glorious God-Man, to Whom all authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given, surrendered to be murdered on a cross.
3. I want to make some confessions here in front of you today. I'm sure that these confessions only apply to me and would never be true of any of you or anyone else in the American Church.
 - a) I really struggle to believe that Jesus is in control. I will verbally acknowledge Jesus' divinity all day, but when things get hard, I become a functional atheist.
 - b) Like the disciples, I struggle to let go of MY vision for what Jesus should and shouldn't do. Instead of letting Jesus make me in HIS image, I make Him in MINE.
 - 1) I have a vision of how my life and all the details surrounding me should go and when I don't see it happen, sometimes I even try to take it by force.
 - 2) All the while, Jesus' life and words say to me, "Travis, take up your CROSS and follow Me"
 - c) I don't **really** believe that Jesus calls me to suffer for His sake.
 - 1) I talk a lot about being willing. I even verbally honor people who do.
 - 2) But when it comes my turn, how quickly I run back to comfort.
 - 3) When MY rights are stepped on, I go to war.
 - 4) When MY will to self-determine is in peril, I use the weapons and the forceful ways of this world to respond.
 - d) And yet with all that mess, when I come to Jesus and say, "Help my unbelief!" He's more than happy to.
 - 1) His grace is greater than all my sin. He's better at forgiving and fixing than I am at sinning and breaking.
 - 2) His job is to show mercy and restore. My job is to surrender and follow.

III. Conclusion

- A. Church, the call of Jesus on your life is not a call to eternal life.
- B. Jesus' call on your life IS TO DIE to yourself. And then eternal life.
 1. Death ALWAYS precedes Resurrection. There is NO resurrection for you without a death coming first.
 2. Even Jesus modeled this for us.

- C. You and I have got to, together, figure out what it means to die to ourselves and follow after Him. There is nothing more serious or more pressing on your time and focus than the question, "How do I die today?"
- D. How do I let the selfish, me-centered, Travis-idolatry religion at whose altar I worship at every day, die and let Jesus step in its place?

I can't answer this for you. And I wish I could give you a bunch of steps to make this happen but at the end of the day, this isn't a "how to". **It's a decision of the will, only possible with God's help.**

And the "how to" will only come if you take it seriously and spend time, effort, and honestly a lot of tears pressing into the heart of God, begging Him to break you away from the cult of you.