

A Life Saving Guarantee

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Date: 29 July 2018

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening. Let's turn to our reading. Over the next four weeks, we'll be looking at the section of Mark that follows on from Jesus' first prediction, and that ends, that's what's at the end of chapter 8. And now this evening, we're going to be picking up at the start of chapter 9 from verse 2. So we're going to be reading Mark chapter 9, verse 2 through to verse 29.

Let's read. 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, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. 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. For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, this is my beloved son, listen to him. And suddenly looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them, but Jesus only. 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. So they kept the matters to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean. And they asked him, why do the scribes say that the first Elijah must come? 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? But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him. And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed, and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them, what are you arguing about with them? And someone from the crowd answered him, teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. 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. And he answered them, oh, faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me. 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. And Jesus asked his father, how long has this been happening to him? And he said, from childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help. And Jesus said to him, if you can, all things are possible for one who believes.

Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, I believe. Help my unbelief. And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the young teen spirit, saying to it, you mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.

[3 : 45] 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. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, why could we not cast it out? And he said to them, this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer. Amen. This is God's word.

Do you turn again in your Bibles to Mark chapter 9. For a young family, if something happens to their parents, it's more than likely going to affect them.

If financial ruin hits the parents, the children are affected. If a parent is tragically killed, then that has huge ramifications for the whole family. Or if a celebrity or ruler is targeted and attempts are made to harm them, then it's likely that their bodyguards could share their fate.

Well, similarly, what happens to Jesus will somehow happen to his people too. Mark makes clear in his gospel that following Jesus is walking his path after him.

[5 : 12] In this instance, Mark has been talking about the necessity of Jesus dying on the cross. And it is to the point that Mark now spends the rest of his gospel heading towards.

So over the next four weeks, we're going to look at the cross and what it means in shaping our lives now. As sure as Jesus must suffer, so must his followers walk the same path.

But the path doesn't stop at the cross. Our passage today comes in the section of Mark that focuses on the necessity of the cross. At the end of chapter 8, Jesus predicts his death for the first time, saying that he must die.

The disciples couldn't understand this. Peter even rebukes him about it. But this isn't the kind of Messiah they were expecting. But then Jesus goes on to say this in chapter 8, verse 34.

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it.

[6 : 23] But whoever loses it for my sake and the gospels will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul?

Jesus is clear. His path is the path to the cross. But his followers must face the same fate. The disciples have seen Jesus do all kinds of things and often haven't been able to see clearly who he is.

Even when Peter did say in chapter 8, verse 29, you are the Christ. He's the Christ. Seeming to finally have understood who Jesus is, he then straight away rebukes Jesus for talking about the cross.

The disciples cannot see clearly what Jesus had come to do. And so they fail to see what the implications are for them. Jesus has come to do something that has cosmic effects, but that comes through the cross.

Mark uses the healing of a blind man in chapter 8 to show that the disciples only see partially. They don't yet see clearly what Jesus has come to do. And so throughout chapters 9 to 10, we see Jesus making clear his path and then pressing whom what shape his followers' lives must take.

[7 : 45] They must set themselves to die that they might live. They must be prepared to carry their cross. Now that phrase has become common parlance for any sacrifice that a Christian makes.

And we must be careful not to cheapen it. Jesus calls his people to follow him with complete abandon, with wholehearted response to him, so that the loss of everything for him is no loss at all. What price is too much? Jesus wants radical self-sacrifice, radical self-denial. That is the path to lasting life.

And in our passage today, Mark is giving us assurance. Guarantee that it's worth it. Suffering and opposition are inevitable. The Christian life is one of giving things up, but not hopelessly and certainly not aimlessly.

And so the first thing we see in this passage, verses 2 to 8, is a glimpse of glory. A glimpse of glory. The transfiguration is a taste of the heavenly, of the consummated kingdom of God, a taste of Jesus in his resurrected glorious state.

[9 : 10] Mark gives us a taste of what is to come to show that listening to Jesus is worth it. To show that following Jesus to death is worth it. To show us that in sharing in his death, we'll also share in his glory.

If we're to set the trajectory of our lives based on what is yet to come, then we need to know that it's real. The choice that humanity faces is whether this life now is most important of all, or if the life to come is.

Or as Jesus himself put it, what good is it to gain the whole world now, but forfeit your soul? We can't strive after the whole world.

World-class education, world-class employment, a world-class spouse, a world-class house, world-class children, world-class things for our children, world-class luxury for our retirement. Is that it? All that striving after the world to end with a world-class funeral? If most people are honest, that trajectory brings uncomfortable questions about whether that would be satisfactory, the whole world now, but then what?

[10 : 33] A life lived to achieve the pinnacle here and now, but then it's all over in a flash. Perhaps there's some that'll still be more attractive than the path of suffering, yet it is the life that does deny itself now that has real glory to look forward to.

Of course we need assurance that it's worth losing our lives, and Peter, James, and John certainly got that as they climbed the mountain. There are various clues in these verses that point to what's happening at the transfiguration.

First clue, there are four allusions to the Exodus story here. Throughout Mark's Gospel, Mark describes what Jesus has come to do as the greater Exodus, Exodus 2.0.

And here there are more echoes. Verse 2, the six days, the high mountain, and then verse 7, the cloud that overshadows them, and the voice speaking from the cloud.

These are all linked back to Exodus, to Moses' experience of God's glory on the mountain, there is glory to come. It is real.

[11 : 48] Moses got a taste of it. The disciples here are getting a better taste of it. And it all points to the glory that awaits in the future. Second clue, verse 3, Jesus' clues become so white that nothing on earth could bleach them like that.

Das doesn't have a chance. Key phrase, no one on earth could bleach them like that.

Because this was a taste of what is to come. Third clue, most significantly, verse 4, we see Elijah with Moses.

Two men who are no longer living in this world, two of the faithful saints of old who represent the law and the prophets, which all pointed forward to a wonderful picture of creation made new, of God's kingdom reigning perfectly over a new heavens and a new earth.

Two men who'd passed on from this life, yet were not dead. In fact, as this takes place on a mountain, verse 2, we see the two other key mountaintop figures with Jesus.

[13 : 04] Moses from Sinai and Elijah from Horeb. The place where the covenant was formed with Moses and then where Elijah was reminded that it still stood. And now we have Jesus' mountain.

Another key juncture for the covenant that God has made with his people. This time it's pointing to its ultimate fulfillment, a glimpse of the glory that Jesus will experience and will bring.

Mark gives us just a little taste of what's in store for the future. The transfigured Jesus, radiant and splendor. He gives us a taste of the glory that awaits us as the people of God.

And verse 6, it's a picture that frightens. They didn't know what to say. They were terrified. It's a picture of what Jesus has come to do. And of course, it can only be achieved through the cross.

And so it's also a taste of what does await for those who would lose their lives now in following Jesus. So what should we conclude from this? Well, we can't put it any better than the voice from heaven.

[14 : 18] Verse 7, this is my beloved son. Listen to him. Listen about what? Listen to Jesus saying that the cross must leave its mark on him and his followers.

The cross is a necessity for Jesus and for us. the mountaintop experience was confirmation that Jesus was the fulfillment of the covenant promises that have been made.

His death and rising again to glory will end in him sitting at the Father's side and it will be a finished work. And so Jesus is the final word.

Listen to him. Listen to what he must do. But listen also and hear what his followers will also endure as they share his suffering and his glory.

So will we chase this world now? Fleeing suffering and so forfeiting our souls? Or will we embrace Jesus' way the way that has at its end a glory that is not of this earth?

[15 : 30] The glory of the resurrected Jesus that the disciples got a taste of. Now, carrying our cross might involve accepting terrible pain.

Many of our church family, especially from our Iranian brothers and sisters, have had to face that in very real ways. But carrying our cross begins in any act or pattern of radical self-denial.

In the act where we show that this world isn't what's most dear to us. It is ordinary Christians gladly looking forward to the glory that Jesus brings and then being content to not have everything that our colleagues and friends and neighbors strive after.

Instead, accepting the scorn, the sacrifice of following Jesus' path. Carrying our cross as being prepared to forego comforts and pleasures even to the point of death.

It's being prepared to stand for Jesus even when it will cost friendships, reputation, money, safety, maybe even a life.

[16 : 44] but the transfiguration reassures us that beginning a pattern of self-denial that may down the line cost us very dearly is a path that's worth it.

Jim Elliot, a well-known missionary who ended up losing his life whilst trying to reach an unreached people group, who was savagely hacked to death by the people he wanted to reach, echoed Jesus' words by saying, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

The glimpse of glory that Mark gives us here is that which cannot be lost. To those who embrace Jesus' glad self-denial, this glory is real and guaranteed.

The second thing to see in this passage, in case we were in any doubt, verses 9 to 13, is the sureness of suffering. The sureness of suffering.

Suffering was Jesus' fate necessarily so and it was John the Baptist's fate and it is the fate of anyone who will follow Jesus.

[18:00] With a picture of glory so fresh in our minds, we must not get carried away and think that that is the present. Many dangerous theologies stem from claiming the presence now of things that are for the future.

For now, it is self-sacrifice. The disciples, again, don't understand what has happened. Verse 10, they're left questioning what Jesus rising from the dead might mean.

They can tell that the glimpse of the future they have is linked to resurrection but again, they're left in the dark. Jesus commands them to keep quiet about what they'd seen.

no doubt because hearing about this display of glory whilst not understanding that it comes through the cross will only cause more confusion. This glory comes only after the cross and so notice verse 9.

That's why they're to keep quiet about it until Jesus had risen. Christ's glory is inextricably linked to the cross. Both go together and so the exchange on Elijah clarifies again that suffering is the way.

[19:08] Verse 11, the disciples ask Jesus the question about Elijah coming which is a reference to the very end of the Old Testament. Malachi says that Elijah will come before the day of the Lord and the disciples are understanding that something about the future is coming that resurrection is being talked about.

So they ask before the last day doesn't Elijah have to come? Well, verse 13, Jesus responds that Elijah has come for Mark has told us already that John the Baptist was the Elijah that God had sent. The very start of Mark's gospel in chapter 1 the description we're given of John the Baptist echoes very similarly the description we have of Elijah and then in chapter 6 John the Baptist is again equated with Elijah.

The prophecy in Malachi was saying that an Elijah would come before the day of the Lord to prepare for it. He has come. He's been preparing people but the king of Israel has beheaded him. John the Baptist came. He was the Elijah. He came to prepare the way for the Lord and he had a great impact but he was killed. He suffered.

[20:28] And verse 12, so it was to be for the son of man. He's to suffer too. He must suffer.

That's what Jesus says. Elijah has come. The impending day of the Lord is at hand. It's coming. The glorious future is now impending. We've seen a glimpse of it already but it will only come through the son of man suffering many things.

Again, we see that Jesus must suffer and in keeping with this section of Mark that means that suffering is the fate of his followers. A suffering prophet and a suffering king points to a suffering people.

And understandably that may come as something that's very uncomfortable for us. But for those who have and those who do experience the cost then it's a real comfort to know that that is what we are to expect.

For many of our Iranians who belong to our church family who've had to give up everything that they knew this is a comfort. For the one who came to faith and was sharing it with his family only for his own family to turn him into the police meaning he had to flee and leave everything he's ever known this is a comfort.

[21:53] It's a comfort because that costly suffering that has scarred him points to a certain future. When we do and when we have shared in Christ's suffering then the prospect of the glory that is to come becomes even more real and even more urgent.

If we share in the suffering if we've known what that feels like then we can be confident that we'll certainly share in the glory. The path is one and the same.

And so finally in verses 14 to 29 there is the reassurance of resurrection. The reassurance of resurrection. If the path of following Jesus depends on him dying and defeating death and for us it

means following him in the cross-shaped life then there's no more important promise than resurrection.

But it's one that requires faith for we need to be able to look beyond this life to see what awaits especially when we're tempted to take the easier path. It is Jesus alone who guarantees resurrection.

That's what we see in this episode. there is a son who's possessed of an evil spirit that causes all sorts of problem. So we've moved very quickly from the glory of the transfiguration and Mark now turns our attention to the struggle that there is in this age with evil.

[23 : 24] What a contrast. This is what needs to be conquered but the future that is coming will be one without this evil. Now let's look at this evil spirit.

He's tormented this young boy making him mute verse 17. Verse 18 causing seizures and all sorts of other things. Verse 21 he's been doing it since his childhood and then we see the climax verse 22 the spirit has even tried to kill the boy tossing him into water and fire.

Jesus' disciples haven't been able to cast this spirit out. They're arguing about what's happened and Jesus despairs at the unbelief that's around him and then he makes clear that with him there are no ifs and buts.

Look at verse 22 and 23. The father says if you can do anything have compassion and help him. Jesus seems to take exception with that.

If you can help if you can all things are possible Jesus says. Of course Jesus could help and then look at the language that is used of this boy.

[24 : 47] Verse 26 he's described as a corpse. Same verse they say he's dead. But verse 27 Jesus can do the impossible.

Jesus can lift up the dead. He can raise to life those who have died. Jesus can save the lives of those who lose them for him. Resurrection isn't just possible.

When following Jesus it's guaranteed. So as we live a cross-shaped life now standing up and standing out for Jesus as we speak the truth to a hostile world that will do all it can to silence us as we give up the treasures of this world for ourselves maybe even for our kids so that we can follow Jesus with all that we have it won't be wasted.

Resurrection is real for those who will lose their lives now that won't be the end. there will be life to come. Jesus can and will do the impossible.

He can and will raise the dead. So as things are hard for us now in 21st century secular Scotland we must hold firmly to this belief about Jesus.

[26 : 16] His cross not only calls us to take up our own it cries out to us that in the end it will be worth it. In this episode unbelief is a big thing.

It may be hard to accept what Jesus was saying about the necessity of his death and perhaps harder still to accept that following him is to give up our lives but it will be impossible if we lose sight of who Jesus is and what he has done and what he guarantees.

The disciples in this passage probably lost sight of this and so they didn't pray and so they didn't trust God to exercise this demon. They show again that they don't know what Jesus is about and so we see their unbelief and so we need to say along with this man I believe help my unbelief help our unbelief when we're drawn to think and do things that say this life is all that there is and we must maximize it or take away our doubts about the treasure of what is to come we must pray help us believe we aren't missing out in this life by following Jesus we must pray get rid of the blindness in us that keeps us from seeing how utterly astonishing Jesus is and what it will be like to be with him at the last day get rid of the blindness that doesn't comprehend why

Jesus must die and why his death and our following his path is essential for us seeing glory at the last all the glory all the resurrection the day of the Lord that was to come these were all guaranteed to come only through Jesus going to the cross and so following Jesus ought to come with a severe health warning because that's our path too but we can embrace it because he is the one who brings life to the dead resurrection to those who follow him glory at the end of the path help us believe that we might pick up our cross and follow Jesus just like when something goes terribly wrong in a family and it affects everyone so too when something good happens we won't just share Jesus cross we will share his glory we'll share his resurrection and that will be worth it amen father we thank you that we can put up with all the trials all the sacrifices all the sufferings that come for following you because we knew that at the last day we'll be joined to our savior who shown us glory and who alone can promise us resurrection so give us confidence to keep going to keep living for

you and trusting our future for we pray in Jesus name amen amen to
[30 : 08] Jesus no he are in is God no he in he got he and on his we win especially