

Ascending With Jesus

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Preacher: Alan Barts

[0 : 00] We have been working through the book or Gospel of Mark for 22 weeks now, and it's just been extremely good for me and my faith personally, and I hope it's been as good for you as well.

So in the, you know, the last few weeks of the series has been kind of heavy. I mean, chapter eight of Mark is heavy. There's a lot going on. There's some really good things. The disciples realize and understand that Jesus is the actual Messiah or promised one.

But then right after that, Jesus bursts all their bubbles by telling them that he must die. He then takes it to a whole new level right after that and tells his disciples, i.e. us, that we must take up our cross too.

Woo-hoo! Everybody gets crosses and die to self. Sounds like a joyful time. This had to have been really confusing and disheartening for them. Their whole lives and for generations before them, they were told and believed that the Messiah would be a great ruler and king that would restore Israel back to prominence, back to power, if you will.

But Jesus kind of lets them kind of live in this turmoil for a few days. And then the text kind of goes in a different direction, starting at chapter nine, where we're actually going to read today about the transfiguration.

[1 : 18] But we also get to look at what happens directly afterwards too. So I'm going to read Mark 9, 1 through 29. I believe it will be on the screen behind me. And he said to them, Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.

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, 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.

[2 : 34] So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean. And they asked him, why do the scribes say that 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?

[3 : 41] 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 us.

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 unclean spirit, saying to it, you mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.

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.

[4 : 43] 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.

This is the word of God. So obviously we have two stories going on here. We got the up the mountain experience, the transfiguration, and then we have the down the mountain experience. Now the second story is about exorcism.

And we're not going to talk much about that, just to be quite honest with you. But I will tell you that July 29th, from 10 to 12 p.m. at our Morehead City site, there's going to be a deliverance ministry going on.

Some teaching on it. You're going to hear some stories, including one that just happened in our church. There's going to be some practical how-tos and some Q&A.; So if you're interested in that, go to the Morehead City website, click on the events, and you'll find out more information about when and where and all those kind of things.

So the other reason that this story deals with exorcism, but the point is not about the exorcism itself. The point is it's about faith. It's about worship.

[5 : 49] And together, these passages, the up the mountain and down the mountain experience, are both about glory and the way into it. First thing we see is the gospel is ultimately about glory.

So previously, before they go up the mountain, six days before, Jesus had spoken about the cross. But then said, in his midst, some wouldn't taste death until seeing the kingdom of God come with power.

They would see it. You have to remember, when they began to turn from the north of Galilee, they're heading south. They're heading towards Jerusalem. And the cross and death await Jesus.

The disciples move in an attitude of ominous grim. They're foreboding. They're thinking about these terrible words that Jesus has spoken to them right after the confession of being the Messiah. Though he was moving towards death, Jesus saw this foreboding cloud of doom hovering over them for six days.

Six days. And after a long six days on the edge of despair, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John. Goes up to a high mountain apart from the people. The scriptures tell us he was transfigured before them.

[6 : 57] The Greek for this transfigured is a form of the verb metamorpho, from which we get the English word metamorphosis. We remember that word from science when talking about a caterpillar becoming a beautiful butterfly or moth.

The whole thing is presented from the perspective of the disciples. You've got to remember, not Jesus. Remember, Mark is telling this story from Peter's perspective, one of the eyewitnesses. Jesus says, some of them would see the kingdom in power.

Well, this is them seeing it. He was so white as if there was no other natural cause for the brightness. No bleach or laundering could render this whiteness.

Now, Mark doesn't use the word glory, but Luke does in the same account. And I think it's what Mark is describing. In 2 Peter, Peter describes being an eyewitness to Jesus receiving glory and honor from God the Father.

He is referring to this moment of transfiguration. Now, the word glory has to do with the majesty of God, the overwhelmingness of God, the divine radiance, if you will.

[8 : 02] Interestingly, in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for glory was synonymous with heavy. To be weighty with honor is to be important, if you will.

In Isaiah 6, Isaiah has a vision of seraphim calling out, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory. The next line in Isaiah, the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called.

The glory is heavy. It's literally causing an earthquake. In Mark, we see Jesus is the radiance in glory. And, of course, he's there with Elijah and Moses.

Can you imagine watching Jesus in this conversation with Moses and Elijah? Do you know what they're talking about? They are talking about what is waiting for Jesus in Jerusalem.

Jesus doesn't have to tell Elijah, get behind me, Satan. Jesus doesn't have to tell Moses, get behind me, Satan, like he had just told Peter. Because Elijah, who represents the prophets, and Moses, who represents the law, clearly understood the vocation of the Messiah.

[9 : 11] They knew Jesus had to die. And they knew why Jesus had to die. And they're with the second person of the Trinity, bringing their comfort and their encouragement to him.

Reminding him of his destiny that they had predicted centuries before. Elijah had been carried up to heaven in a chariot, not to return to Palestine for centuries. And Moses, who was denied entrance into the promised land, had been waiting for centuries as well.

And now he comes not on an adventure that is horizontal where he's crossing the River Jordan. No, he's on a vertical adventure. He comes from heaven and his feet finally hit the promised land.

And he is there to speak to the Savior. How amazing a scene would that have been to behold. You know what else they had in common, Moses and Elijah? They were the two prophets who stood on mountains and had theophanies, or God experiences.

They saw God on Mount Sinai and talked with him. In 1 Kings chapter 19, Elijah goes up and God passes before him. In Exodus 33, Moses goes up and says, show me your glory.

[10 : 18] And God says, I'm going to hide you in a rock when my glory passes by. Because my face cannot be seen. It's too much for you. It will literally kill you. They both go up on a mountain, see some of God's glory and speak with him.

And here they are on a mountain doing what? They're speaking, but this time to Jesus. If they were talking to Yahweh before, centuries back, what does that say about Jesus?

Jesus is Yahweh. They are seeing God's glory and speaking with the same one to whom they had long ago spoken to on the holy mountain. And Mark tells us the three other guys, Peter, James, and John, are just terrified.

They're so terrified that Peter says, let's make some tents. It's easy to poke fun at Peter. He oftentimes opens his mouth and sticks his foot in it.

I can relate. I do that often. But I'm not so sure that Peter wasn't actually doing a very reasonable thing. It seems like Peter thought this moment was going to last a much longer time.

[11 : 24] In the Old Testament, when God's presence showed up, it always had a dwelling place, a booth, a tabernacle. That's actually what the Greek word means. And here's what's crazy. All three accounts say that right as he said that, a cloud comes and covers them.

Right as Peter says, let's build the tents, a cloud comes and covers them. Now, if you're Peter, this is just insane. Because this is what happened when the tabernacle was built. In Exodus 40, cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of God filled the tabernacle.

Jewish rabbis called this cloud the Shekinah glory, which means to dwell. God's glory would descend as a cloud to dwell. So Peter says, let's make tents or booths.

And the cloud comes. It's happening. But they haven't made the tents. They haven't made the booths. And that's the point. Instead, I recently became a teenager.

Instead, a voice booms out of the cloud. This is my beloved son. Listen to him. And suddenly, they look around and see no one.

[12 : 32] Both Mark and Luke stress that it's as the voice speaks that Moses and Elijah disappear. In fact, I think that's the most important part of their role in this story.

They're disappearing. It's like God is saying, you have listened to Moses and Elijah. You have listened to the law and the prophets. Now, listen to him.

Listen to Jesus. You have taken what was a good thing. The law was a good thing. The prophets were good things. And have twisted it so much that it has now become an idol. It's like God is pressing the reset button for humanity once again.

They wanted to see God's glory on the mountain. God's saying, you have God's glory contained in a person. Moses came down the mountain. His face was shining, reflecting the glory of God.

Hebrews 1.3 says, he is the radiance. Jesus is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being. They, Moses and Elijah, are nothing compared to the man who stands before you now.

[13 : 36] Peter assumes God's glory needs to dwell in a tent. God says, my glory is already dwelling with you. It's him. He is the new tent. He is the new tabernacle. He is the new temple.

He is all of those things. Listen to him. Six days before, they heard probably the most troubling thing in their life. Jesus is talking about dying.

And for a week, they've got that rolling around in their heads. But then they see this. God gave them a tiny foretaste of what's to come. Look, crosses await.

Yes. Suffering awaits. Yes. But that's not the end. There's glory coming. Radiance and glory that you've never dreamed of. That's why Jesus tells them to not tell anyone.

But it's the first time he has this caveat. He says, until after he rises from the dead. Keep it a secret, but only for now. The transfiguration doesn't merely point to Jesus' resurrection, but to the culmination of human history.

[14 : 39] Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 writes about the resurrection and describes it as a weight of glory. That weighty glory of God that causes the earth to shake will be given to you, which is insane.

Moses had to hide his face because to see God's glory would have killed him. But God says, this is my beloved son. Listen to him. He's going to make a way for you and I to not only see my glory, but to wear it yourself.

Listen to him. Well, the three disciples were probably not fully comprehending what they were seeing. A lot to take in, obviously. Drinking from a fire hose. Yes. And they're coming down and they're asking about Elijah.

Why do the scribes say Elijah must come? And Jesus' response is, well, let's just say it's to the point. And he said to them in verse 12, 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.

[15 : 47] They asked about why Elijah comes. And Jesus says, the scribes are only partially right. Elijah does come first. But guess what? He already did. He's John the Baptist. The scribes were expecting basically what happened on the mountain.

They were expecting glory. They were expecting the cloud. They were expecting all of that stuff. Jesus is saying they were right. He had to come. But they misunderstood what the point was. And in between, he parks this other question.

It says, they say Elijah comes. And then he asks them, and how is it written of the son of man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? Another version of the Bible puts it like this.

Why is it written of the son of man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? Why? Elijah had to come, but he already has.

But that's not the real question. The real question, the only question is, why does the son of man have to suffer? Why can't we just have the mountaintop experience all the time?

[16 : 49] Why can't we have that now? Well, suffering must always precede glory. Jesus has been transfigured. And look how quickly he returns their attention to the subject of suffering and contempt.

Not only suffer, but be shamed. It's almost immediate. Why, Peter? That's the question you should be asking. How is it written that that's necessary?

Why is that a thing? Well, I suppose every Sunday we're answering that question, aren't we? Because we need it. The whole Bible is answering that question.

How is it written that Moses can only lead the Israelites out of Egypt if the Passover lamb died first? How is it written that Elijah only had his moment on the mountain after running for his life from the wicked queen Jezebel?

He stops under a tree and says, it is enough. Now, O Lord, take away my life. For I am no better than my father's.

[17 : 49] The lowest point for Elijah. The suffering. A literal symbolic death. And at that point is when an angel comes and feeds him. Sends him to Mount Sinai.

He sees the glory of the Lord. We see this pattern. This is the pattern of God. 2 Corinthians 4, 17. For this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

Light and momentary? For some of us, that's probably not very true. Feels like the weight of the world is on our shoulders. I get that.

I understand that. It's all relative. But it's relative compared to the glory that's coming. What can we say about the current suffering? It's light.

And it's not permanent. That's our hope. Because that's so much heavier and solid. But the one prepares us for the other. There is no glory without suffering and affliction.

[18 : 51] And the fact that it is true for Jesus is just astounding. You know, I've said this before. But the hardest question for a Christian involves suffering and evil.

If God is so good and powerful, how do we explain it? How do we explain where it came from? There are some theories and answers we can give.

That's true. But I got to be honest with you. It is arguably the most difficult mystery. And to some degree is unanswerable. And that used to really bother me. Why God?

Why don't you stop suffering? Why do you seemingly stand there and watch it? Why don't you stop suffering? But then I don't remember. I don't remember when this happened or how. But I realize this question is actually at the center of everything I believe.

Not only does God allow suffering. And we can't avoid it. He arranged to suffer more than anyone else. And he could have avoided it. It was like in my moment of doubt, seeing all the suffering around me and crying out, Why?

[20 : 02] Why, God? It's like the Lord said to me, Why is it that the Son of Man should suffer? If you were tempted to doubt the goodness of God because he allows people to suffer, just remember that even he didn't escape it.

And it was by his design. Suffering must precede glory. It is the design. This is why Jesus is always so frustrated.

Like when he comes down the mountain. A boy has a demon. And everyone's arguing about it. The scribes are arguing. The rest of the disciples have tried to cast it out and they're unsuccessful.

So it's just pandemonium. There's anger. There's frustration. There's failure. This is what happens when things don't go as planned. We suffer and lose our minds.

What's happening? Jesus is like, Are you not understanding anything? Faithless generation. What do you think he'd say to us?

[21 : 03] Why isn't suffering on your agenda? It's kind of a crazy question. Hello, this is the way. We don't carry crosses because we have some weird self-loathing.

We don't suffer because we think poorly of ourselves. We do it because Jesus showed us it's the way of glory. Everyone wants glory. That's the good stuff.

Everybody wants the good stuff. We just hate the process. I mean, look at this story. The disciples try to cast out a demon but without prayer. I'd say they've gotten a bit confident.

They think they can do this on their own. You know, we got this. There's a sense of presumption. I would say there's a sense of arrogance going on. Well, what is prayer? Prayer is humble.

It's to bring yourself low. It's to admit how powerless you really are. It's saying, I can't do anything. God, you do this. Prayer puts you in the position of helplessness, which itself is kind of a painful thing.

[22 : 07] Why do Christians always say that they don't pray enough? It's because it's hard. It's its own kind of labor. It's easier to labor in work and activities than to labor in prayer.

That's just truth. The exorcism in this story isn't about Jesus versus the demon. There's no comparison to that. It's Jesus versus spiritual pride.

That's the deal. Spiritual pride. The disciples seek the glory of delivering this boy without first humbly going to their father and acknowledging they need him.

In fact, in this story, there's only one person who goes low. Only one person who admits his weakness, who faces the music, if you will, who does the hard and painful and honest thing is the father of the boy.

Jesus asked him some questions, and the man says, if you can do anything, have compassion and help us. Do you know why he said it? Because that's what you normally say. Because normal people can only do so much.

[23 : 11] And so Jesus calls this right out. If you can, all things are possible for the one who believes. And this father gives what might be one of the most important lines in the Bible.

Verse 24, it says, immediately the father of the child cried out and said, I believe. Help my unbelief. That is a very frank and pure statement.

There's no guile. There's no pretense. Part of me believes God. Help the part of me that doesn't. It's not even help my boy. Help him and help me.

I don't know how to believe more on my own. And what happens? Does Jesus rebuke the guy for his half-heartedness? No. He rewards the faith that is in this man.

He does exactly what the man had asked. Glory, healing, all the good things. They come through suffering. But how are you going to do that? Well, the story gives a massive clue.

[24 : 10] Following Jesus through suffering requires true faith and worship. The alternative to this, you can try and muscle it through life, you know, pull yourself up by your bootstraps.

But that won't do much good. That's the lesson the disciples got here. That's the lesson we should get here. You never get past needing God's help.

You never get past needing God's help. And for some reason, and I don't know why, God insists on being asked. He already knows it all.

Why does he want us to ask? It's not always easy for my brain to bring faith and worship into my problems. It doesn't work like that all the time. And sometimes we don't ask because we don't want to be let down.

Who wants to be disappointed? We doubt. When you ask, you have to bring whatever faith you have and then be honest about the faith you don't.

[25 : 06] Look, small faith isn't a good thing. That's true. It's not a good thing. Jesus wants us to have great faith. But worst of all is pretending to have faith.

The very act of pretending your faith is better than it is reveals that your confidence is in your faith. Because then the focus isn't even on him anymore.

It's not on Jesus anymore. It's on you trying to create something you don't have to prove that you're righteous and holy and deserving. But to say what this man said is to say, Jesus, even my ability to believe needs help from you.

That's faith in Jesus rather than faith in yourself. Look, if you're a Christian, what do you do with your doubts? I'm talking about the ones you're afraid to admit.

How can we really know Jesus loves me? Isn't the Bible really old? Isn't it outdated? And what about how good people that don't believe but have great lives?

[26 : 10] What about that? Do you pretend you don't have those doubts? Do you try and bury them? That's the natural thing to do. I'll just ignore them until they go away.

See, the deal is, every other religion tells you that you have to be holy enough, have faith enough, and then God will bless you, accept you, whatever.

So your confidence ends up being in yourself and what you can do. And so people become fakers, pretenders, or they think they can never have faith because they doubt.

But the gospel says the opposite. As Tim Keller says, it is helplessness, not holiness, that gets you in audience with Jesus. It is helplessness, not holiness, that gets you in audience with Jesus.

You're never going to drum up enough holiness. You'll just end up being a hypocrite. Instead, you admit what you really are.

[27 : 15] I lack faith. I've got tons of doubts. God, help me with my doubts. Now your confidence is in him. You come helpless. You come as you are.

But he doesn't just leave you there. He actually answers prayer. He adds faith. And holiness isn't simply your gift to him. It's his gift to you. Something he adds to you. That's saving faith.

Where it's about him, not you. But you also have to worship through suffering. If your life isn't characterized by worship, you'll never make it. You'll never find glory.

Worship can be described as many things, but ultimately it's sacrificial adoration. Anything you prize, anything you value, you sacrifice for. Look, the father gives his son to Jesus.

His son who he is anxious about and cares about. And guess what? When Jesus drives out the demon and he looks dead, everyone thinks he's dead. How often do people give things to God and then it seems like everything gets worse?

[28 : 24] Now for the father, in this story, things get better in a moment. But sometimes it takes a long time. Sometimes we get put through the ringers for a long time.

I get that. If that is worship, giving God your most precious things, how are you going to keep doing that even when it seems like things are getting worse? You give God your desire for romance and then romance doesn't happen.

You give God your career and then your career tanks. Part of worshiping Jesus is wanting the glory only he can give. The temptation is to think that the things you have now are the weighty, the meaningful things.

What is the most hopeful part of your future? Is it your family? Is it your career? Romance? What is that?

But there's a reason that people can't achieve everything and still find a gnawing sense of something's missing. Like you never quite get there. And so you pile your hopes and your dreams on these things and you keep doing that and you keep having that gnawing there's something wrong, there's something missing.

[29 : 30] But the best thing you can do, the only thing you can do is to stop worshiping men and start worshiping Jesus with them.

It gives you talents which means you hold them open. Open handed. Saying God, I want this but you choose. You do with it what you want.

That's true worship. But not in a sense of like stoic suppression of desire. No, that's not right. You need to foster a desire for something better.

In the weight of glory, C.S. Lewis has this famous quote about how we choose to play in the mud rather than having a holiday at sea because our desires are not too strong but they're too weak.

Look, do you know what you really want? I mean, do you really know what you really want? Maybe, but I doubt we all do. Not unless you really, really had a hard look inside.

[30 : 31] I think what you want is to be praised and adored by the ones you praise and adore. The ones that you hold in honor. Everybody loves that. People that you look up to and they say, that's a good job.

That's a great thing. How does that make you feel inside? There's nothing better than that. It is written that we shall stand before him, God, shall appear.

We shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ that some of us, that any of us who really chooses shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God.

To please God, to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness, to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son.

It seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain, but so it is. C.S. Lewis. The voice came out on the cloud and said, this is my beloved son.

[31 : 44] One day, you and I are going to stand basically naked. We're not going to be able to hide anything any longer before God. If you aren't in Christ, the fact of the matter is, you're going to see the face of God and it's going to destroy you like kindling to a flame.

That's true. That's harsh, but that's truth. But if you and I are in Christ, you don't merely survive it. You are welcomed into it.

You will be robed with a weight of glory so that the Father, beaming with pride, looks at you and thunders, this is my beloved son. This is my beloved daughter.

Think of your proudest moment and achievement, being recognized, your wedding day, whatever. Nothing will compare to that moment when God says, welcome. This is my beloved son or daughter.

As the band comes up, I've got a few questions for you to ponder. What is happening with your suffering? It is certain, but what is it doing to you?

[32 : 51] Is it preparing you for the future of glory or just making you bitter? Do you think that what's been lost won't be made up for somehow by what's coming?

Think about that. What's happening with your doubts? Some of you need to pray this prayer today. It could even change your life. You need to pray, God, I believe, but I also struggle to believe.

Help me. That's real. That's like the saving faith. It's about him then. It's about Jesus Christ. It's no longer about you. And then, what kind of glory do you want?

You want the glory of men? It's light. It's not heavy. It's why everyone's carrying around this anxiety about how pointless and meaningless things seem. We need to worship Christ.

We need to worship by giving him everything. And yeah, they may seem to get worse. That's true. But glory is coming. You and I are merely being prepared for it.

[34 : 00] Amen.