

Elijah has come.
Mark 9

Isaiah 40-1-12

Ephesians 1:1-14

Congregation Hebrews 4:14-16, 7:23-27, 9:24

This week we are going to continue the account of the transfiguration. Last week we looked at the actual event and this week we will be looking at the events that quickly followed. So let us read this morning starting in chapter 9 vs 1, through verse 14. So if you remember what we talked about last week there were a few of the implications of Christ's transfiguration that we discussed. One, was the revelation of Christ in glory. Up until this point the disciples have seen many amazing miracles, and have been taught by him but they did not yet fully understand. We know this because of their constant reactions of fear and doubt when confronted with Jesus' authority and power.

2nd, was found in this theme that has continued to run through this book of mark and through Jesus ministry, which is Those who have ears, let them hear, or listen up. And we see here the voice of God comes to the disciples in a cloud saying that this is my beloved son, hear him. This happened right after Peter suggested making tabernacles for Jesus, Elijah, and Moses. As we have seen this response of Peter's was one out of fear and amazement, for he knew not what to say. Here we have, those who are seen as the proverbial head of the Jewish faith, the prophet Elijah who foretold of the coming messiah and the deliverance of Israel, and Moses in whom the laws and traditions were given in the wilderness on the way to the promised land. So it is no real surprise that Peter would react in this way, being a Jew himself but the voice of God comes and points to his son, listen to him because he is the one that all of these others have pointed to.

And the 3rd implication of this is the resurrection. Seeing Elijah and Moses here with Jesus shining in glory stands as a proof to the resurrection to come. Not only Christ's, but that of all who are in him. If there was no life after death, if there was no eternal state, then obviously Elijah and Moses would not have been present. But as we see in verse 9 and 10 here they did not completely understand yet the idea of the resurrection, they understood in the resurrection at the end of days when all of God's children would be caught up into heaven but they did not understand Jesus remarks when he said to not tell anyone of these things that they have seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

They saw the resurrection as something that happened in the future, they still did not understand that Jesus was going to die, and rise again in 3 days even though he told them plainly. As I said when we went through the last few verses of chapter 8, when he revealed this to his disciples and we see that Peter took him aside and rebuked him, for there is no way that the promised messiah who was to come and save Israel would die, he has come to set up his kingdom. But they did not yet understand that his kingdom is not of this world, they believed that he had come to set up his kingdom here on earth, to establish Israel as a mighty nation, but that was not his purpose, instead he had come to establish his heavenly kingdom, where he now sits at the right hand of the father having accomplished salvation for Israel, that is to say, the Sons of Abraham, but not those who are the mere physical descendants, but rather it is all those who are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, God's chosen people who he has chosen from before the foundation of the world according Ephesians that we read this morning.

This question that the disciple had about Christ rising from the dead is not one that they actually voiced or asked, but rather just pondered among themselves wondering what he was talking about. But as we do see they did ask him "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first.?"

Upon thinking on this it occurred to me that this answer from the scribes was probably one that was used to refute the idea that Jesus was the messiah. For in their mind there was no way that the messiah would be revealed until Elijah had returned and prepared the way for him. The closest thing I can think of in comparison to this is that of the concept of the dispensation understanding of the returning of Christ. One thing that they believe that must happen before the end of days is that the Jewish Temple will be reestablished and rebuilt in Jerusalem. This is the reason for the conservative political fascination with the nation of Israel, with the understanding that they are God's people and as long as we are allied with them then we should gain blessings, and besides we want to make sure that Israel stays a sovereign nation for when God returns to establish his temple.

So the Jews were waiting for a sign, much like those who hold to a dispensational eschatological view. Before the Messiah can come, these things must happen. And in honesty, they are both right, before the Messiah would come Elijah would come and prepare the way as was foretold by the prophets of old. And before God would return in the end of the age, the temple will be established. But in both of these cases I think they are making the same mistake. It is being caught up in to literal of an understanding and we see that here with Jesus answer to his disciples in verse 12. "Then he answered and told them, Indeed Elijah is coming first and restores all things. And how is it written concerning the Son of Man, that he must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I say to you that Elijah has also come, and he did to him whatever they wished as it is written of him."

Now Mark does not record Jesus going into any detail here about how is it that Elijah has come already and prepared the way for the Messiah? But Mark is written in more of a summary form quickly going through events and not going into great detail about each one, in Matthew's recording of this account he writes that after Jesus said that Elijah has already come, the disciples understood that he was talking about John the Baptist. This is something that Mark sort of already alluded to in the 1st chapter. Lets go there real quick and read that. Starting in Chapter 1.

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the lord make his paths straight. John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Verse 7, And he preached saying there comes one after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose, I indeed baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. " John's ministry was the prophesied return of Elijah, the one who cries in the wilderness calling for repentance.

It is not as though John was Elijah reincarnated, but he had come in the spirit of Elijah, his ministry was like that of Elijah. I think it would be beneficial to go back and look at some of the verses in scripture that reveal that this is actually the case. The last words of the Old Testament is this prophesy that Elijah will come, Malachi chapter 4, verse 4-6. "Remember the Law of Moses, my servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers lest I come and strike with a curse.

Now John was directly asked if he was Elijah, which we can find his reply in John chapter 1. starting in verse 19. "Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him Who are you? He confessed and did not deny, but confessed saying I am not the Christ. And they asked him What then, are you Elijah?"

He said, I am not, are you the prophet? And he answered no. Then they said to him who are you that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?

He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the lord. As the prophet Isaiah said.”

So we see that John is not Elijah reincarnated, but rather had come in the spirit of Elijah, we see that in Luke chapter 1 when the angel of the lord appears to Zacharias verse 11. “Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zachariah saw him, he was troubled and fear fell on him but the angel said to him, do not be afraid Zacharias for your prayer is heard and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mothers womb, and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers of the children and the disobedient to wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Then finally and explicitly without a doubt, is Jesus teaching on this recorded in Matthew chapter 11. verse 7 “ As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John. What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in the kings' houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet, for this is he of whom it is written. Behold I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare the way before you. Assuredly I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist but he who is the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force, For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear let him hear!”

Just a quick little side note here that jumped out at me as I read this passage in Matthew, where Jesus says, All the prophets and the law prophesied until John. The implication here is that the prophets, and the law's prophesy ended with John the Baptist. Once again because all of these things are fulfilled in Christ, who John the baptist's ministry prepared the way for. So as we can see the scribes were likely using this statement waiting for the physical return of Elijah was discredit Jesus messianic claims, but as we see even in the old testament prophesies that it was fulfilled in John the baptist who came in the spirit, or likeness of Elijah. And I believe that the dispensational understanding of the rebuilding of the temple commits this same error, expecting the temple to be physically rebuilt in Jerusalem.

The temple is where God would meet man, in the holy of holys. But that physical temple is no longer needed because it is through Christ that we have a mediator between God and Man and no longer through the temple, and the priests. Those things were shadows, examples pointing to Christ just like the law and the prophets. Even Christ himself referred to himself as the temple in the book of Luke chapter 2, verse 13-22. “ Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And he found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves and money changers doing business. When he had made a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and powerd out the changers money and overturned the tables. And he said to those who sold the doves, take these things away, do not make my fathers house a house of merchandise! Then his disciples rememberd that it was written, Zeal for your house as eaten me up. So the Jews answered and said to him, what sign do you show to us since you do these things?

Jesus answered and said to them, destroy this temple and in 3 days I will raise it up. Then the Jews said, it has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you will raise it up in three days? But he was speaking of the temple of his body, therefore when he had risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this to them, and they believed the scripture and the world which Jesus said.”

And also at his death, the veil that covered the holy of holys in the temple was torn from bottom to top, eliminating the separation between God and man. The temple is where sacrifices would be offered for sin, and the priests would enter the holy of holys not without blood. But now, when Christ died on the cross that veil was torn signifying that the price for sin has been paid in Jesus death, and that the temple was no longer needed for sacrifice for sins, but it has all been fulfilled in Jesus. And we see later in the book of Acts that the temple was utterly destroyed in AD 70, and it has not existed sense, but there is the belief that the temple will be rebuilt and God will return there which as I said I believe is a misunderstanding of these passages of scripture. Hebrews says that the temple was symbolic of the things to come, chapter 9 starting in verse 6 now when these things had thus prepared, (talking of the sacrifices) the priest always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. But into the 2nd part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood which he offered for himself and for the peoples sins committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to conscience, concerned only with foods and rinks, various washing, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, not with the blood of Goats and calves, but with his own blood he entered the most holy place once for all having obtained eternal redemption.

Verse 15, And for this reason he is the mediator of the new covenant, by the means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. “ There is therefore now no need for a physical temple, we have the temple that is not made with hands, and the veil has been torn so that we may have access to God through our high priest, and sin sacrifice Jesus Christ. The temple served its purpose, it was a picture of God, of Christ it was tied into the old covenant that has passed away. And in Christ he has established a new covenant. So this idea of needing to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem actually is quite offensive if we really think about it, for it is a rejection of Jesus Christ's work, and his priesthood becoming the new temple in his body. Our access to God is through Jesus, not through a building.

Now that we have gone off on that little tangent, let us return now to our verses this morning, so we see that the disciples did not understand what he meant by he would rise again in 3 days because they refused to think of him as one who would suffer and die, even when clearly told that was coming. Then Christ commands them to be silent and not speak of this things that they saw. Other then the reasons we have seen before where he has commanded them to remain silent, here there weighs a heavier purpose. First off in his instruction he tells them not to say anything until he had risen from the dead. Before there was no condition on his commandment of silence, but here we see that this one is different. Which I think points to one of the reasons which is the importance of the cross and resurrection. It is only through this final revelation that the disciples will truly see and understand Jesus' ministry.

Even in some of the passages we read today, they said that after his death and resurrection the disciples recalled and understood what Jesus had meant. It is only through the cross and resurrection that we can truly see and hear Christ's ministry. That is clear as we have gone through this book and constantly seeing the disciples seeming to be dense and not understanding, but we are looking at this from a different perspective, we are reading these accounts as history, through the lens of the rest of scripture and after the full revelation of Christ at his resurrection and ascension.

This shows that all other knowledge outside of the cross, outside of the death and resurrection of Christ really does not amount to much. It is inadequate. Believing that Jesus was a good teacher, a moral standard, or even a prophet means absolutely nothing if you deny that he was the messiah who came to lay his life down for his people. Also I think that this command to silence is important because instead of the transfiguration being a foreshadowing of Christ entering in glory, it could have easily been a distraction, being caught up in the event just like the multitudes were at the performing of miracles, but the transfiguration was not the point, it was not the culmination, nor the final revelation of God's glory and purpose, but rather it is the cross, at Jerusalem.

And lastly in closing this morning we see again Jesus mentioning the upcoming suffering that he must endure. Verse 12 here in Mark. "Then he answered and told them, Indeed Elijah is coming first and restores all things, and who is it written concerning the Son of Man that he must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I say to you that Elijah has also come, and they did to him whatever they wished as it is written of him." I think in closing I am just going to quote Edwards in his commentary on this verse, he says. "Finally, we see Elijah too, must suffer. Elijah has come, and they have done with him everything the wished. This statement surely sent a shock wave to Jesus' hearers, for they were as unprepared for the suffering of Elijah as for the suffering of the Son of Man. Apart from only vague references like that found in 1 Kings, there was no hint that Elijah would suffer before the day of the Lord. The reference here of the suffering of Elijah, is of course a reference to John the Baptist. As it is made explicit if Herod had dealt severely with the forerunner of the Messiah, should there be any surprise of the fate of the Messiah?"

This statement about Elijah's suffering must have resonated with Mark's first audience which itself was subjected to the savageries of Nero's persecution. And it resonates today with the persecuted church in various parts of the world. Whenever Christians follow Jesus on the way of the cross, they find themselves exposed to the world and vulnerable to its machinations. The inevitable suffering that results in discipleship to Jesus is not a sign of abandonment by God, but rather that of fellowship with the Son of Man who must suffer much and is rejected. Remember this when suffering comes upon you for the sake of the cross, and the word of God. For our identity is one that is in the suffering savior who died on the cross, who tells us that we too shall suffer for his sake but when he returns in the fullness of his glory we will be caught up with him into our eternal peace and rest, rejoicing around the throne of the sovereign God of all, for we can not forget that all of this is tied into his instruction in the previous chapter to take up our cross and follow him.