

“Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory”
The Gospel According to Mark 9:1-13
May 27th, 2018

Back in the 1920’s and 30’s, Al Capone owned Chicago. He was notorious for bootlegging booze, running prostitution, and murder. Capone’s lawyer was nicknamed "Easy Eddie." Eddie’s legal skill kept Al out of jail for a long time. Capone paid Eddie well and Eddie got special dividends. For instance, he and his family lived in a fenced-in mansion with live-in help and all of the conveniences of the day. The estate filled an entire Chicago city block. Eddie lived the high life of the Chicago mob.

Eddie had a soft spot, however. He had a son he loved dearly. Eddie saw to it that his son had the best of everything: clothes, cars, a good education. Price was no object. Eddie wanted his son to be a better man than he was. Yet, with all his wealth and influence, there were two things he couldn’t pass on to his son: a good name and a good example.

One day, Eddie reached a difficult decision. He wanted to correct wrongs he had done. He decided he would go to the authorities and tell the truth about Al "Scarface" Capone, and in so doing, clean up his tarnished name and offer his son some semblance of integrity. To do this, Eddie would have to testify against the mob, and he knew that the cost would be great. So, he testified. Within the year, Easy Eddie’s life ended in a blaze of gunfire on a lonely Chicago Street. But in his eyes, he had given his son the greatest gift he had to offer, at the greatest price he would ever pay.

Easy Eddie made a great sacrifice for his son by squealing on Al Capone and the Chicago mob. In so doing, Eddie gave up his life for doing what was right to atone for past wrongs. In a much larger, more profound, and incredibly glorious way, Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God the Father made great sacrifices for His sons and daughters by His life, death, and resurrection from the dead.

And, as we’ve seen in our weekly study of God’s Word, Jesus’ disciples are beginning to understand more fully the purpose in the Messiah’s coming to earth as He reveals, little by little, the coming of His Kingdom on earth.

We come today to the 9th chapter of Mark’s gospel account – the second book you’ll find in the New Testament of God’s Holy Word, which we call the Bible. I invite you to stand as we hear God speak to us by His Spirit in His Word – **Mark Chapter 9:1-13**.

The Gospel According to Mark 9:1-13:

And He (Jesus) said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.”

²Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. ³His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. ⁴And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”— ⁶because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid.

⁷And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” ⁸Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves.

⁹ Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰ So they kept this word to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant.

¹¹ And they asked Him, saying, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”

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? ¹³ But I say to you that Elijah has also come, and they did to him whatever they wished, as it is written of him.”

The Transfiguration of Jesus, prominent in today’s passage, is also included in the other two of what theologians call the “synoptic gospels.” That term refers to the first three of the gospel accounts – Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The word “synoptic” is a form of the word “synopsis,” which means to take a general view of something – a summary, if you will. In regard to the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke they present or take a similar point of view. You can read Matthew and Luke’s perspective of this passage in **Matthew 17:1-8** and **Luke 9:28-36**.

The passage in Mark’s account, which we just read, can be split into two primary points. The first is **Jesus Transfigured** in verses 1-8; the second is **Elijah Tormented** in verses 9-13. Let’s begin by seeing **Jesus Transfigured**.

At the beginning, we need to understand the context of what is said in verse 1 – “And He (Jesus) said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.”

It’s important for us to realize that here in verse 1, Jesus expands upon the conversation begun in verse 38 of the previous chapter. Chapter headings/numbering can come in the most inconvenient points! (After all, this gospel account was originally written without them!) Go back with me now to chapter 8. The last verse reads, “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

When I commented on this verse last Sunday, I focused on our shame, when given the chance, of not testifying to others of their need for salvation from sin. But, let’s also note that the verse concludes with a reference to Jesus’ Second Coming to earth, “the Son of Man (Jesus)...coming in glory....with the holy angels.” Jesus’ words at the beginning of chapter 9 refer not to Christ’s coming again, but, as we’ll soon see, to what will take place 6 days later. There is commonality between **Mark 8:38** and **Mark 9:1** – both speak of glory.

So, Jesus is saying that there were some men He was addressing that wouldn’t die until after they’d see the “kingdom of God present with power.” That prophesy took just 6 days to be manifested. Jesus took three of His disciples – Peter, James, and John – with Him to the top of a high mountain. They were His inner circle, His closest friends. *Why did Jesus take three?* Perhaps because of what **Deuteronomy 17:6 and 19:15** say of witness credibility being two or three. With that in mind, Jesus had something He wanted his friends to see and know as they climbed to the relative privacy up the mountain.

When they got to the top of the mountain, Jesus was transfigured before their very eyes. It’s in verses 3 and 4, “His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on

earth can whiten them. ⁴ And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus.” This was a revelation of Jesus’ divinity. Before this, the apostles knew Him to be human, even a special one at that. But, they had just witnessed something they didn’t really know how to process.

Jesus’ appearance was otherworldly changed; his clothes were supernaturally white, reflecting splendor and glory. And, just like that, two other figures had appeared with Jesus. Verse 4 says they were Elijah and Moses. *Why is that noteworthy?*

“Both of these men had previously conversed with God on mountaintops – Moses on Mt. Sinai, and Elijah on Mt. Horeb. They both had been shown God’s glory. Both also had famous departures from earth. Moses died on Mt. Nebo, and God had buried him in a grave known only to Himself. Moses was the great lawgiver and Elijah was the great prophet. Moses was the *founder* of Israel’s religious economy, and Elijah was the *restorer* of it. Together they were an ultimate summary of the Old Testament economy.” (Hughes, 16)

It was a mind-blowing situation for the disciples. We’re not surprised that Peter is the one who brings voice to their bewilderment (in verses 5 & 6) – “Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”— because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid.”

Perhaps it is helpful to consider Peter’s first words as a question – “Rabbi, *is* it good for us to be here?” That would seem to coincide better with the sense that the three men were “greatly afraid.” *What’s the significance of Peter suggesting three tabernacles? Perhaps he was thinking of a way to be sheltered from the brilliant light and glorious splendor? We can’t know for sure.* Regardless, these men had caught a brief glimpse of all that Jesus would be when He returned from heaven to earth as King and Judge. As quickly as it began, the transfiguration ended.

Briefly, we’ll consider our second point, **Elijah’s torment**. As Jesus, Peter, James, and John descend the mountain, Jesus instructs His apostles not to tell anyone what they experienced, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. The text indicates this was confusing for the disciples; they were still having difficulty grasping that Jesus had come to suffer.

Elijah was persecuted by King Ahab; John the Baptist was persecuted by King Herod. John is the Elijah sent by God because he fulfilled the function expected of Elijah, leading the people to renewal through repentance and forgiveness.

One commentator observes, “How wonderful it would be stay on the mountaintop and bask in His glory! But discipleship means denying self, taking up a cross, and following Him; and you cannot do that and selfishly stay on the mount of glory. There are needs to be met in the valley below. If we want to share the glory of Christ on the mountaintop, we must be willing to follow Him into the sufferings of the valley below.” (Wiersbe, 141)

We cannot leave this passage without heeding the spoken words of God to the disciples as they were on the mountaintop with Jesus. In verse 7, the Father said, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him.” This was the same voice that spoke when Jesus received baptism (**Mark 1:11**) – “You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

If we're honest with ourselves, we give our attention to a lot of other voices, and some of them are downright harmful to our walk with Jesus. Sometimes, it's a seductive voice promising love, comfort, and companionship in the arms of someone to whom we're not properly married. It could be the voice of opportunity, suggesting something left unprotected is rightfully ours. The nightly news, our best friend, a neighbor, our mother, colleagues, trade journals, and entertainment channels all pour opinions into our head and it's up to us to sort it all out.

Sometimes, the voice is a loved one who is counseling you to do something contrary to what God would have you to do.

To all of these voices and many others, we must listen first and foremost to Jesus' voice. He is the great teacher. *Want to be wise?* Listen to Him. He is the Light of the World. *Want to steer clear of error?* Listen to Him. He is the Head of the Church. *Desire to be a living member of His mystical body?* Then you must listen to Him.

"Him let us hear. **In** Him let us abide. **On** Him let us lean. **To** Him let us look. He and He only will never fail us, never disappoint us, and never lead us astray." (Ryle, 178)

Remember how I opened this message? Al Capone's lawyer, Easy Eddie? There's more to the story. And it is most fitting for our consideration on Memorial Day weekend.

Lieutenant Commander Butch O'Hare was a fighter pilot assigned to the aircraft carrier Lexington in the South Pacific during WWII. One day his squadron was sent on a mission. After he was airborne, he looked at his fuel gauge and realized someone had neglected to top off his fuel tank. Butch's flight leader told him to return to the carrier. Reluctantly, he headed back. As he was returning to the mother ship he saw a squadron of Japanese aircraft speeding their way toward the American fleet!

The American fighters were gone; the fleet was defenseless. Butch couldn't reach his squadron and bring them back in time to save the fleet. Nor could he warn the fleet of the danger. There was only one thing to do. He must divert them from the fleet. Laying aside his personal safety, he dove into the formation of Japanese planes. Wing-mounted 50 caliber's blazed as he charged in, attacking the aircraft. Butch wove in and out of the now broken formation and fired at as many planes as possible until all his ammunition was finally spent. Undaunted, he continued the assault by diving at the planes, trying to clip a wing or tail in hopes of damaging as many enemy planes as possible and making them unfit to fly.

Finally, the exasperated Japanese squadron left the area. Deeply relieved, Butch O'Hare limped his tattered fighter back to the carrier. Upon arrival he related what happened. The film from the gun-camera mounted on his plane told the tale. It showed Butch destroyed five enemy aircraft!

That was February 20, 1942, and Butch was the US Navy's first ace of WWII, and the first Naval Aviator to win the Congressional Medal of Honor. A year later he was killed in aerial combat at the age of 29. His home town would not allow the memory of this hero fade, and today, O'Hare Airport in Chicago is named in tribute to the courage of this great man. So the next time you're at O'Hare, give some thought to visiting Butch's memorial display. Maybe you've seen it. It's located between Terminals 1 and 2.

Oh, remember Easy Eddie, Al Capone's lawyer? Butch O'Hare was his son.