

SESSION SEVEN

The Glory of Jesus: *The Importance of Relying Upon Christ (Mark 9:2-28)*

“What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better [equipment], not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men, men of prayer.” ~ E. M. Bounds

I. Overview

The apostle Peter writes in his second epistle that his recounting of Jesus' life is true because Peter was an eyewitness. The apostle then cites an event from the life of Jesus to validate his point. Interestingly, Peter does not refer to the resurrection of Lazarus, the calming of a storm, or the casting out of a legion of demons. Instead, the apostle Peter mentions the Transfiguration of Jesus! Indeed, this event in the life of Jesus is so powerful and theologically rich that all three of the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—record it!

But why? Why do the New Testament writers devote so much attention to this event? The Transfiguration is deeply embedded in the theological development of the gospels. This scene emphasizes Jesus' identity and His glory. For Mark, “the transfiguration would provide a momentary but nonetheless significant anticipation of Jesus' heavenly glory along with the fulness of God's kingdom, together with God's own legitimation of the hard words that Jesus has spoken concerning the suffering Son of Man and the character of discipleship.” (J. B. Green, “Transfiguration,” in *DJB*, 2nd ed., 969). The discussion following the Transfiguration and the immediate scene of the disciples' inability to cast out a demon, further heighten the importance of the Transfiguration and the disciples' need to know this one called Jesus.

II. The Content

A. The Transfiguration of Jesus: *A Display of His Glory (9:2-13)*

The scene serves as a direct fulfillment of Jesus' words in 9:1. Peter, James, and John are the only ones who have the opportunity to see the kingdom of God prior to their own deaths. The ironic twist is that the suffering of the Messiah, which Jesus addressed in 8:31, serves as the gateway to the coming of God's glorious kingdom.

This entire scene is reminiscent of the time when Moses met God on a high mountain in Exodus 24:1-18 and 34:29-35.

v. 2 - Peter, James, and John appear to serve as leaders among the twelve disciples. Certainly, later in the Book of Acts, these men serve as pillars of the early Church.

v. 3 - “. . . *more so than any launderer in the world could bleach them.*” The point suggests that no natural explanation exists for this condition.

v. 4 - Both Moses and Elijah served as eschatological figures. Both Old Testament characters symbolize the coming of the long-expected messianic age (cf. Deut 18:15-19; Mal 4:4-6). Part of the reason these individuals were selected is based upon the circumstances surrounding

their departures from this earth (Deut 34:5-6; 1 Kgs 19:14). Both individuals were also seen as figures of restoration—bringing Israel “out of exile”.

vv. 5-6 - Mark portrays that Peter’s offer to construct three tents was seen as highly inappropriate.

v. 7 - God’s declaration parallels the same pronouncement at Jesus’ baptism (cf. 1:11). The statement is then followed by a command—a warning not to come to Jesus with preconceived notions (also, cf. Deut 18:15).

vv. 9-10 - Jesus’ reference to “raising from the dead” means that his death must occur. The notion of the “Son of Man” dying was foreign to a first-century Jew. The disciples expected a triumphant Messiah—similar to the one they just witnessed on the Mount of Transfiguration!

vv. 11-13 - The disciples espoused a commonly-held view among first-century Jews that Elijah would come and restore the hearts of the Israelites—preparing them for the coming of the Messiah (e.g., Mal 4; Sir 48:10). While affirming the arrival of one like Elijah, Jesus indicates that this prophet’s ministry was rejected—the same fate looming for the Son of Man. If there is any doubt concerning the identity of this returning Elijah, the Gospel of Matthew tells us that the disciples understood that Jesus was talking about John the Baptist (Matt 17:13).

B. Success and Failure in Exorcism: *A Dependence Upon His Glory* (9:14-29)

Following on the heels of the Jesus’ discussion with Peter, James, and John, the disciples’ inability to cast out the demon demonstrates their need for further instruction and training.

vv. 14-18 - This is the fourth and last exorcism recorded in Mark’s Gospel (cf. 1:21-28; 5:1-20; 7:24-30).

v. 19 - The disciples’ unwillingness to take God at His word hinders their ministry. The disciples represent a generation in which Jesus seeks to address (cf. 8:12).

v. 20 - The Greek term for “convulsion” is the same term used for the violent action associated with a dog tearing up a carcass. The scene is most dramatic and hopeless.

vv. 21-22 - The duration of the condition is correlated with other miracles in Christ’s ministry (cf. 5:25; Lk 13:11, 16; Jn 5:5; 9:1). The father’s response conveys the hopelessness and despair concerning his son’s life-threatening state.

“ . . . if you are able to do anything . . . ” - After the disciples failed to heal his son, the father conveys extreme caution in his request.

vv. 23-24 - Jesus responds with an ironic rebuke questioning how the father could even think to question Jesus’ abilities! The father responds to Jesus’ rebuke with a proper perspective of Christ—a quenching of his own self-doubt.

vv. 25-27 - Jesus' command is emphatic, stressing his personal authority over the demonic realm. The power of the demonic realm is only further seen in the demon's departure.

vv. 28-29 - In his commentary on Mark, R. T. France summarizes this section well, "They [the disciples] have become blasé and thought of themselves as now the natural experts in such a case, and they must learn that in spiritual conflict there is no such automatic power. Their public humiliation has been a necessary part of their re-education to the principles of the kingdom of God." (p. 370).

III. The Intersect

- A. We need to be careful to approach life's problems with an utter appreciation of God's power, excluding any motive to be self-governing or autonomous.

Proverbs 3:5-6 -

- B. Ministry, or life for that matter, requires prayer. We must be dependent upon the Lord.

Ephesians 6:18-20 -

- C. How confident are we that the Lord is not only capable of answering our prayers, but that He is also willing to do so?

James 5:16b-17 —

"Time spent in prayer will yield more than that given to work. Prayer alone gives work its worth and its success. Prayer opens the way for God Himself to do His work in us and through us. Let our chief work as God's messengers be intercession; in it we secure the presence and power of God to go with us." ~ Andrew Murray