

Mark 9

The chapter break between 8 and 9 is a clever insertion that attempts to keep intact the meaning of Christ's discourse - especially relative to verse 1 --

[Mar 9:1 NKJV] 1 And He 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."

Taken out of context, or observed in a vacuum, this takes on a mysterious meaning that we are unable to decipher.

But taken with the remainder of verses 2-7, the Transfiguration, it appears to fit in nicely even if all of our questions about the depth of Christ's words may not be answered - and indeed some of those things will remain a mystery to us until we see Him face to face.

A note on chapter, pericope, and verse divisions:

"The chapter and verse divisions were added to the Bible for the sake of convenience. There is no authoritative basis for the divisions we now find. For the greater part of human history, there have been no chapter or verse divisions in Scripture. In fact they can cause a number of problems...Chapter and verse divisions give the impression that the

Scripture should be read and studied in bits and pieces. This is not what the original authors intended. The entire context must always be considered. Consequently, the chapter and verse divisions should be ignored when one attempts to properly interpret the entire message of Scripture.” (<https://tinyurl.com/yd65keoe>)

In verse 1-7 Mark’s language is quite vivid - remember that it is likely that Mark received this version of events from Peter, a participant in these events.

Jesus takes Peter, James and John separately and while they are with him they witness a miracle - which should not surprise them, but it does.

They see Jesus TRANSFIGURED (μετεμορφώθη) - changed before their eyes, robed in divine brilliance - “such as no launderer on earth can whiten...”

What they saw was supernatural, and glorious, it was as if they were getting a glimpse of Christ's divine nature, or a more clear representation of His full personhood other than what they expected.

They see Jesus meeting with Elijah and Moses - representative of the Law and the Prophets.

So here we have the Law represented, the Prophets represented, and the fulfillment of them both communing with one another - in agreement with one another, not rivals.

Peter, not knowing what to say, and rightfully terrified, blurts something out!
Application: if you don't know what to say - don't!

**Sometimes I wonder if after Jesus told Peter that he had received wisdom from heaven in Matt 16:17 if Peter didn't feel like he had to continue saying things.*

So Peter, not knowing what to say, says "let's stay here!"

And isn't that the temptation for us all? We should not beat Peter up - we are just like him. Having seen something amazing, having seen Jesus in His glory, sometimes we just want to camp right where we are!

Many have built tabernacles, tents, to camp out where they once saw God's glory; where they were once moved to awe - but refusing to move from that spot haven't seen anything in a long time.

Sometimes when we get stuck trying to relive or recreate a spiritual experience we end up turning a movement into a monument into a memorial.

V.7 God speaks to them and reminds them to be listeners! Probably timely for Peter and certainly timely for all of us.

V.8-13 Only Jesus, and what does Jesus teach them?

He teaches them about the resurrection - which they did not yet understand. By now they may have been asking why this topic of suffering and death and resurrection seemed to be popping up more frequently.

Relative to their recent experience, they have a question about Elijah - they have just seen him on the mountain during the transfiguration event and so now they're wondering - is it true what the scribes have been saying that he must come before Jesus can do His work? "How does that impact us?" is the implied question.

[Mat 17:11-13 NKJV] 11 Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. 12 "But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands." 13 Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.

Sometimes people get twisted up about this along with what John writes about:

[Jhn 1:21 NKJV] 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

The reality is that it didn't matter what John said about himself. What mattered was what Jesus said about him. The same holds true for us.

V.14-16 The rhythm of Jesus' ministry - the scribes come out to dispute. Be on guard. Theological disputes are not uncommon in our day.

Shun idle babbling, avoid foolish disputes, don't pay attention to fables, don't strive with one another about words - these things all tear down rather than building up. (Cf. 1 Tim 1:4-7, 2 Tim 2:14-23)

V.17-24 Jesus heals the most hopeless of cases

This was an affliction that was part of this boy's life from childhood - whatever it was, and it was severe, and nearly cost this child his life on several occasions.

And, this son is in no state to petition for himself - but his father does for him. His father intercedes on his behalf because it hurts him too and after so long in this state we find that this man has come to a crisis in faith!

We come to one of my very favorite verses in the NT - v. 24, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief."

This is a man undone. Laid bare and transparent, there is no sense of pretense - just the confession of a half-hearted belief that is in need. This speaks to the common Christian condition.

In this moment Jesus does not turn away but extends His compassion and bolsters this man's belief. This man, this desperate father is asking for a healing in his own spirit too; and Jesus meets him there.

In this instance Jesus does more than just physical healing, the boy's affliction was more than physical. We see that He works in the physical and spiritual realms.

V.25-29 The deed is done

Jesus teaches his disciples on the need for prayer and fasting - they were unprepared.

Not because Jesus withheld authority from them but because they weren't drawing near to God practically in their own lives by way of prayer and fasting.

Keep in mind that earlier Jesus defended these men when they were challenged for not fasting: [Mar 2:18 NKJV] 18 The disciples of John and of

the Pharisees were fasting. Then they came and said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"

But now here it is, they're still not fasting nor praying - at least not to the degree that would prepare their faith for effective work in the Kingdom.

Prayer and fasting - often neglected, yet so needful - not because they earn us anything but because they reveal our weaknesses to ourselves and remind us how much we need God.

How can we hope to do the works of the Father when we don't spend actual time with Him? How can we hope to do a work of God, there is no greater work, if we aren't speaking with Him or hearing from Him?

How can we obey Christ's command to deny ourselves and follow after Him, if we are unwilling to practically deny ourselves the smallest of things. (Cf. Matt 16:24)

V.30-32 Continued teaching on suffering, death, and resurrection. Jesus is driving the point home!

Jesus discussed these things quite a bit with His disciples. BUT -- they did not understand! AND were afraid to ask!

Keep in mind Jesus taught these things in advance so that when they came to pass then they would understand.

Of course they were confused in the moment - their whole lives they had been taught that a conquering messiah would come to Israel, restore them to glory, overthrow their earthly overlords, and grant them a new kingdom! They were looking for a political, military, savior - someone akin to King David!

But Jesus' kingdom far surpassed their expectations AND in its establishment still did all of those things that they expected on the eternal plane - by means of the cross.

Jesus Christ makes them/us glorious, He overthrows our earthly oppressors (namely sin/flesh), He establishes a new kingdom where our citizenship is in heaven, and He reigns forevermore!

V.33-37 Be a servant - wait tables

These pillars of faith, the disciples, keep arguing about who is greatest among them. We get the picture that sometimes they liked a good argument. They were arguing with the scribes in verse 14, now they are arguing with each other.

They are trying to establish a hierarchy, a rank-ordered system, an order of merit.

Jesus flips their paradigm upside down.

What does greatness mean? Does it mean to rule over people? To have authority over others? To have your name on the sign? Jesus says that greatness is found in serving other people (δίακονος - one who renders service to another).

Serving others is one of the special marks of Christ's kingdom.

Unfortunately in our corporate church world, this dispute still occurs - who is the greatest personality, greatest teacher, greatest author, greatest apologist, greatest mind, greatest mentor, greatest encourager?

All of those are nothing next to serving others with diligence and the Spirit of God.

Of this type of servant Thayer's Greek Lexicon reads, "it is used fig. of those who advance others' interests even at the sacrifice of their own..."

[Mat 20:25-28 NKJV] 25 But Jesus called them to [Himself] and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 26 "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.

27 "And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave-- 28 "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

In conjunction with this teaching on servanthood, Jesus teaches them about gentleness and warmth too - you will notice that Jesus takes this child up in His arms.

That is a warm and intimate gesture, caring for the children of others - making sure kids feel loved and safe is important to God.

There is a duty to care for others, the weakest and smallest among us. Children need care or else they will perish!

There is a spiritual application here, don't miss it!

V.38-42 John shifts gears, but Jesus comes back to the center.

Perhaps John was trying to gain some accolades for "exposing" people who weren't of their tribe. Jesus corrects him on this point.

We should be careful of this too. There are other people moving and working in God's kingdom who may look different, move different, think differently, but as long as they keep Christ the center of their doctrine then they will be okay and we need to be open to the idea that God uses people

according to His own will, for His own purposes, and He doesn't require our permission to do so!

One of the dangers for us is that we can spend so much time pointing out other denominational failings or shortcomings that we don't do ANY kingdom work at all!

The beauty of this movement we are a part of is that we don't look the same, operate the same as other traditional denominations but we preach Christ crucified and we rely on His Word and His Spirit and nobody can take that from us.

What we are a part of confounded traditionalists, and still does sometimes. But we must be careful that as our movement ages we don't become wedded to the method, but that we remain in love with the message - the gospel.

V.42 - Jesus turns his illustration into a teaching on caring for the little ones in Christ who live among us - we bear with them, support them, don't try to trip them up, OR suffer the wrath of a protective Father.

God cares about people! He has not commissioned us to go about wounding others in our arrogance and ignorance. We are commanded to deal gently with others - especially baby Christians.

“If a small act of kindness towards others done in Jesus’ name will be eternally remembered, so will any cause for stumbling. And the punishment is severe:...Some Christians think nothing of drawing young, weak Christians into their own little squabbles and divisions. They themselves emerge without much damage, but the little ones they brought with them into the squabble often end up shipwrecked.” (Guzik)

V.43-48 Just as we are commanded to deal carefully in gentleness with others, conversely we are commanded to deal ruthlessly with sin in our own selves!

Take Jesus’ word for what it is. Don’t over allegorize.

Know that removing the hand doesn't remove the heart of sin.

Sin lives in the heart, but Jesus’ point is CUT IT OUT! Be ruthless, be committed.

[Rom 6:11-14 NKJV] 11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members [as] instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members [as] instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

[Rom 13:14 NKJV] 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to [fulfill its] lusts.

[1Pe 2:11 NKJV] 11 Beloved, I beg [you] as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,

We are all too ready to chastise and correct others in the name of sound doctrine and accountability while giving ourselves a hall pass for the unknown sin in our own lives.

CUT THAT SIN OUT! Or rather, let Jesus Christ cut it out for you.

This is where obedience, grace, and faith intersect - the practical living out of our faith as empowered by the Holy Spirit.

V.49-50 You are the sacrifice, a living breathing sacrifice offered to God, consumed by His fire, seasoned with salt, to be presented to Him for His glory.

Jesus uses this really interesting parable here to illustrate what it means to be part of His kingdom in light of everything he has taught them.

The illustration he uses recalls the OT sacrifice.

This is what an acceptable sacrifice looks like - having gone through the fire, seasoned, and at peace.

That's what Jesus is cooking up in our own lives. To His glory.

“Israel’s sheep were reared, fed, tended, retrieved, healed and restored - for sacrifice on the altar of God. This end of all pastoral work must never be forgotten - that its ultimate aim is to lead God’s people to offer themselves up to Him in total devotion of worship and service.” (William Still, The Work of the Pastor)

[Rom 12:1 NKJV] 1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, [which is] your reasonable service.

We are the sacrifice! May our lives reflect that. May the peace we have, our salt, our sear - be evidence of that.