

# Truth for Today

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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**Broadcast Date:** 12 July 2009

**No.** T0581

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## God's Servant in Mark's Gospel: A Glorious Saviour - Mark 9

In the autumn of 2007 we considered the first four chapters of Mark's Gospel. Last December and January we looked at the next four chapters, chapters 5 to 8. Today we begin to consider chapters 9 to 12, looking at chapter 9 in this talk. All of these talks are under the general heading of "God's Servant in Mark's Gospel". If you would like to receive details of the previous talks on any or all of the first eight chapters, please let us know.

Before turning to today's chapter, it is important to remind ourselves of some general features of Mark's Gospel. Mark presents Jesus as the Servant compared with Jesus as King in Matthew, as Son of Man in Luke and as the Son of God in John. Mark's is the shortest of the four Gospels as things move quickly, in keeping with the constant action of a servant and the frequent use of words such as "straightway" and "immediately". Unlike the other Gospels, there is no earthly or heavenly genealogy in Mark because the test of a servant is not his background but his ability actually to do the job well. Chapter 1 introduces Jesus, emphasising that, though a Servant, He is the Son of God. Mark's Gospel contains far more miracles than parables, more actions than words, in keeping with this presentation of Jesus as a Servant.

We come, then, to our chapter for today, chapter 9, which we will look at under the heading of "A glorious Saviour". In the immediately preceding chapters, Jesus had been performing miracles in the area around the Sea of Galilee and He continues in that area throughout chapter 9. I would like to divide this chapter into three sections, the first up to verse 13, covering what we term the transfiguration, the second, verses 14-29 dealing with Jesus casting out a demon from a child and the third from verse 30 to the end, where the Lord talks to His disciples.

Verse 1 of our chapter today strictly belongs to the events and words of chapter 8. However, it is also a link verse to chapter 9. Let me read the verse, reading from the Authorised Version of the Bible: "And [Jesus] said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power".

Here Jesus was foretelling that in a few days' time three of His disciples would actually see a foretaste of the kingdom of God. I don't imagine that any of those listening understood what the Lord meant or the privilege to be granted to some individuals to witness the power of God to bring this event to pass. We must read the whole of this section, from verse 2 to verse 13: "And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves. And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean. And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come? And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought. But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him".

This is an amazing event! What is its purpose? Shortly we will consider some of the detail but I believe that one of the main purposes of the record of the transfiguration is to present a prophecy that Jesus will, at some stage in the future, return in His great glory to establish His kingdom on this earth for the period that is generally referred to as the Millennium and that His saints will return with Him.

The transfiguration is also recorded in Matthew 17 and in Luke 9. If you have time and are interested in studying the Bible, a comparison of the detail of these three records of the transfiguration is an interesting and rewarding exercise. The reasons for many differences between these records can be traced back to the different presentations of the Lord in the various Gospels, as I referred to earlier. The transfiguration is not recorded in John's Gospel and I suggest the reason for this could be that John emphasises the Person of the Son of God rather than His glory to be seen on earth.

Moving into the detail in Mark 9, Peter, James and John saw Jesus "transfigured before them" (verse 2). This word transfigured literally means to change into another form. I understand that the word used is the same as the basis for metamorphosis which is used in a zoological sense as the term to describe the complete and dramatic change between the immature form and the adult form of some animals. The change in the Lord's form was also dramatic and these men actually saw the Lord's glory shining out.

Mark's emphasis in verse 3 is on the Lord's clothing which he describes as shining or dazzling, and not just white, but exceeding white like the whiteness of pure snow, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. Do you get a sense that Mark is struggling for human words which will adequately describe this scene of glory where all the focus is on this glorious Saviour?

Both Matthew and Luke record that the Lord's face or countenance shone, shone as the sun as it says in Matthew. Mark emphasises the Lord's clothing because it is that which is seen outwardly and Mark continues to bring Jesus as the Servant to our attention. How unusual to equate a servant with glory but here in Jesus is the Servant who was perfect and glorious in everything that He did.

Then in verse 4, the three disciples see two Old Testament men of God talking with the transfigured Jesus. There is Elijah, sometimes referred to as the servant prophet, and there is Moses, used by God to give the law. As we know, Elijah was taken out of this world to heaven while still alive. Moses died and was buried. Sometimes these two Old Testament men are suggested as representative of groups of saints, Elijah of saints who are alive when Jesus comes and who go to heaven without dying and Moses of saints who have died but whom Jesus will raise.

The disciples were afraid at what they saw. The record brings us back down to earth because Peter, as impulsive as usual, says that they should make three tabernacles or booths for the three men they had just seen. He effectively was making Jesus, Elijah and Moses all of equal standing. This is the same Peter who only in the previous chapter had declared to Jesus that "Thou art the Christ", God's chosen, unique One.

God moved immediately to speak on this important issue. If we look back to the end of Exodus 40, we see there that when the tabernacle was complete a cloud came over it and verses 34 and 35 of that chapter tell us that that cloud was equated with the glory of the LORD. It is worth reading again verse 7 of today's chapter: "And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him". The disciples had just seen a display of glory on the mountain. Now, in keeping with that, a cloud signifying God's glory overshadowed them and God's voice spoke to them to remind them that God's Son is unique and far above any other person, even two great men like Elijah and Moses. God's voice told them to hear what His Son had to say. It was His Son alone who spoke with absolute authority. May I suggest that this is also a reminder for us today that, whatever anyone else may say, authority rests only with what God and His Son say, as recorded in the Bible, the Word of God.

Almost as if to emphasise this, Mark then writes in verse 8 that at this point the disciples looked around and saw nobody else "save Jesus only". People come and people go, but Jesus is always there. God was pointing these men to His Son and what a difference seeing Jesus only could make to their lives and to our lives too!

On the way down the mountain, Jesus instructs the three not to tell anyone what they had seen until Jesus had risen from the dead, or as the accurate translation is, until Jesus had risen from among the dead. The disciples were puzzled about this. They understood and believed the truth of the resurrection of the dead but that an individual should rise from among the dead was beyond their understanding.

Finally in this section of the chapter, probably arising from seeing Elijah on the mountain top, the three disciples ask Jesus about Elijah's relationship to certain events. Jesus confirmed to them that Elijah would first come prior to the Lord's first coming into this world and prior to the Lord's appearing at the end of the Great Tribulation. If we were to look at Matthew 17:11-13, we would see that John the Baptist was sent like an Elijah to precede the first coming of Jesus into this world; that had already happened. Looking to the future, Malachi 4:5-6 states that another one like Elijah will come "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD". At the time of this conversation in Mark 9, both the sufferings of Jesus at the cross and the coming of another Elijah-like person lay in the future, but these coming events are certain.

I have taken some time over the first 13 verses in this chapter of 50 verses but this record of the transfiguration with its display of Christ's glory is amazing. When you have time, read 2 Peter 1:16-19, where Peter looks back on the transfiguration. It had left an indelible mark on Peter. In those verses he refers to them being "eyewitnesses of his majesty" and to hearing God's voice of approval of His Son "from the excellent glory". I believe that as we consider the wonders of Jesus, God's Son, by faith we can receive glimpses of His glory, His unique, supreme excellence, and this can transform us in our appreciation of Him and of our living for Him.

We come now to the second section of our chapter, from verse 14 to verse 29. Jesus and the three disciples come down from the glory of the mountain of transfiguration immediately to be confronted by a situation which demonstrated Satan's power and the horror of what happens when that power takes hold of a person. A father had brought his son to the other nine disciples. These verses tell us that, from being a young child, the son had been possessed by an evil spirit which caused him to be deaf and dumb and to have seizures. The convulsions made the son foam at the mouth and grind his teeth. Sometimes the demon cast him into the fire or into water in an attempt to destroy him. The son was wasting away. The father was desperate.

The nine disciples had been unable to do anything and the scribes were making the most of the situation in front of a large crowd of onlookers. The disciples were powerless at this display of the effects of Satanic power. But then Jesus takes over and calls for the son to be brought to Him.

Initially this seems to make matters worse because, when the demon saw Jesus, he completely convulsed the boy, who fell to the ground, rolling around and foaming at the mouth. Before dealing with the demon, Jesus makes two references to faith, firstly in verse 19 to the lack of it in that present generation and then in verses 23 and 24 to the need of the boy's father to have faith if his son was to be healed. It seems from verse 22 that the father was not confident that Jesus had the power to heal, but in verse 24 the tearful father utters from his heart those crucial words "Lord, I believe". In response to that faith, Jesus demonstrated His power over the evil spirit by instructing it to come out of the boy and never to enter him again. At that, the demon had one final surge of power over the lad, leaving him lying on the ground looking as if he was dead. Jesus then helped the son get up and he was fine.

The early chapters of Mark contain many miracles but there are not many after this one. I want to emphasise three points from it. The first is to notice that it was only the power of Jesus which could overcome the power of Satan and bring real life where previously there had been a pitiful existence. The disciples were powerless, but the demon had to bow to the authority of Jesus. There is no greater power than the power of Jesus! The Bible teaches that in a day to come that power will be demonstrated on this earth when all the forces of Satan will be defeated and everyone and everything will bow the knee to Jesus. Even today, the power of Jesus over sin is shown whenever someone becomes a Christian. The power of Jesus can change any life and overcome any sin.

The second point I want to underline from this miracle is the importance of faith in Jesus. It was only when the son's father showed that faith that his son's healing took place. The Bible teaches that personal faith in Jesus is required before my sins can be forgiven. As Romans 10:9 tells us, I have to believe in my heart before I can be saved.

Thirdly, after the disciples asked Jesus why they could not cast out the demon, Jesus tells them in verse 29 of the importance of prayer for His followers. Prayer demonstrates dependence on divine power. The disciples themselves did not have power but prayer would provide it to them from the One who has all power.

So to the last section of Mark 9, from verse 30 to verse 50, in which the Lord is talking to His disciples as they journey together. It seems that there are four matters which He wishes to bring to their attention.

First of all in verses 30-32 Jesus again tells them of His forthcoming death and resurrection. Let me read from verses 31 and 32: "The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him".

This was by no means the first time Jesus had told His disciples of these events to come, for example in chapter 8 verse 31, nor was it to be the last. The Lord's words seem clear to us, but for the disciples at that time there was no understanding and they were even afraid to ask Jesus what He meant. Of course they did not at that time have the Holy Spirit abiding in them to reveal the truth of God, but might it also be that their thoughts were taken up with hopes of Jesus very quickly establishing His kingdom on this earth? The idea of Jesus being killed hardly fitted with that prospect.

The second matter which Jesus brings to His disciples' attention is in verses 33 to 37 and arises because Jesus knew that the disciples had been arguing amongst themselves which of them would be greatest in the kingdom which they envisaged Jesus shortly setting up on earth.

In this Gospel which portrays the perfect Servant, Jesus tells His disciples of the divine order of greatness. "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all" – see verse 35. Later in the Bible, Paul, writing to the Philippians says: "...Christ Jesus...equal with God...took upon [Himself] the form of a servant..." Jesus lived out the taking of a servant's place, despite His greatness. Jesus reinforces His message by taking into His arms a child, an inconsequential being in the normal order of things, and tells them that receiving a child in the name of Jesus, means that the receiver of the child also welcomes Jesus and His Father.

Disciple means learner. The disciples were having to learn some important lessons from the One who is both glorious Saviour and perfect Servant. Each of us also have to learn these lessons from the same Person.

The third of the four matters is in verses 38-41 and results directly from what Jesus said in the previous verses. John said that the disciples had rebuked a man who was casting out demons in the name of Jesus and yet was not one of the twelve disciples. That man was doing what these disciples had been unable to do earlier in the chapter. Jesus draws from this the lesson that "he that is not against us is on our part" – verse 40. The crucial thing was that the man was acting in the name of Jesus, and in opposing what was of Satan, he effectively was supporting Jesus. Let us beware of criticising others of the Lord's people who may not be part of our particular fellowship, but are opposing Satan and are operating in the name of Jesus, which implies acting according to the Bible. Another lesson for the disciples and for us to learn!

The fourth and final matter in this section covers verses 42-50. I would urge every listener to read these verses for themselves, carefully and prayerfully. The message is a most solemn one: don't let anybody allow anything to so influence us now that we end up in hell in the future. In the picture in these verses, it must be terrible to lose a hand or a foot or an eye; but nothing is more terrible than hell, where those there live forever and the fire is not quenched – see verse 48. Jesus as the faithful Servant preached the message of God faithfully and often spoke of hell. Any faithful preacher now has to speak of the reality of hell for those who do not know Jesus as their personal Saviour and Lord. At the same time it is a joy to be able to tell of heaven where Jesus now is and to where all believers in Him will go.

Mark 9 covers a lot of ground. It opens with a view of the glory of Jesus, which will be displayed in this world in the future. This left such an impression on the three disciples. It is amazing that Jesus asked His Father that all who believe on Him should "be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory" – see John 17:24. The chapter closes with a graphic view of hell, the absolute opposite to that opening view of glory. I wonder where your future lies?

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