

The Gospel of Mark

Leon L. Combs, M.A., M.Div., Ph.D.

Chapter Nine

Mark 9:1-4

*And Jesus was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." (2) Six days later, Jesus *took with Him Peter and James and John, and *brought them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; (3) and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. (4) Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus.*

Jesus had just finished speaking to the disciples about His suffering and death and they had a hard time with that revelation. Jesus then continued to elaborate on some of what must happen to them. When Mark quotes Jesus as saying "taste death" he is relaying the statement from Jesus about the violent deaths they would face because of their devotion to Him. Jesus is not referring to the Parousia as some have stated but they will be given a visible manifestation of the completeness of the Kingdom through a vision of Him in His glory. This vision occurred six days later to some disciples. The transfiguration is a preview of what will happen at the end of the age when Jesus will be with us in all His glory forever: "*For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.*" (Mark 8:38) This revelation was given to the inner circle of Jesus' disciples: Peter, James, and John. These same people were present with Jesus at the resurrection of Jairus's daughter and with Jesus at Gethsemane. The high mountain is not identified although Mount Tabor is often the traditional site although it is only 1843 feet above sea level. Mount Hermon is over 9,000 feet high and is the more probable site. It is located near Caesarea Philippi, which is where the event Mark has just recorded occurred. The Greek word translated transfigured is *metamorphoo* and is also used in the incident recorded by Matthew: "*He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.*" (Matt 17:2). It is also used in the accounts when believers change into the likeness of Jesus:

- Rom 12:2 "*And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*"
- 2Cor 3:18 "*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being **transformed** into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*"

Even the clothes of Jesus were transfigured as Mark adds that there was no chemical method that could make His garments seem so radiant and white. The Greek word translated "white" is *leukos* and is the same Greek word used to describe the robes of the elders before the throne:

- Rev 7:9 “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in **white** robes, and palm branches were in their hands;”
- Rev 7:13 “Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “These who are clothed in the **white** robes, who are they, and where have they come from?”
- Rev 7:14 “I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them **white** in the blood of the Lamb.”

This Greek word comes from the Greek word for light and since this “color” is made such in the blood of Jesus, it results from the cleansing made possible by that blood.

In the accounts of Matthew and Luke, the people with Jesus were listed as Moses and Elijah rather than Elijah and Moses so we wonder why the reverse orders. Elijah is the Jewish expectation of being with Jesus at the final state of glory:

- Mal 4:5 “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.”
- Mark 9:11-12 “They asked Him, saying, “Why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” (12) And He said to them, “Elijah does first come and restore all things. And yet how is it written of the Son of Man that He will suffer many things and be treated with contempt?”

Moses is a later addition to the Jewish concepts of the end times so perhaps that is why he is mentioned second. Mark may also have been meaning to show representatives of the Law and the Prophets. Certainly Moses would be representative of the Law but it seems that some other prophet such as Isaiah would be mentioned rather than Elijah. It is not known how Peter, James, and John recognized these people although Moses and Elijah both ended their lives on earth mysteriously. But if that were the reason then Enoch and Elijah would have been appropriate. This event just seems to be a mystery that we will not fully understand until later but it is reassuring to know that people will somehow be recognizable. Moses did physically die on earth and Elijah did not so perhaps that is a reason why God chose to have the disciples record them as the witnesses with Jesus. At the End Times both those still living and those who died will receive resurrected bodies (1 Thess 4:13-17).

Mark 9:5-8

*Peter *said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” (6) For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified. (7) Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!” (8) All at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone.*

Being true to his nature, Peter responded impulsively as he was greatly moved by the experience but did not understand it. The tabernacle was the tent of meeting where God communicated with man. Peter seems to want to extend the time of this event perhaps because he did not want to consider that Jesus must suffer and die for the completion to occur. Mark shows his sensitivity for Peter since what Peter said was not worth saying and Mark wanted to excuse Peter by indicating that he was terrified at the event. At His baptism the Spirit spoke to Jesus (1:11) but

here God spoke to the three disciples since this experience was for their spiritual growth. They would then know that although the Jews would reject Him and the Romans would put Him to death (8:31), Jesus was accepted, approved, and loved by God. The reference to the cloud is a standard means of the presence of God (Exod 16:10; 19:9; 24:15; Lev 16:2; Num 11:25). They are then commanded by God to listen to Jesus and this must be a learning listening:

James 1:22-24 *"But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. (23) For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; (24) for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was."*

To how many sermons and teaching experiences do Christians really listen? I would say the percentages are very small. Having Moses and Elijah then disappear emphasizes that Jesus is the One to whom they must listen. The Words of Jesus outweigh the words of the Prophets and the Law.

Mark 9:9-13

As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. (10) They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant. (11) They asked Him, saying, "Why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" (12) And He said to them, "Elijah does first come and restore all things. And yet how is it written of the Son of Man that He will suffer many things and be treated with contempt? (13) "But I say to you that Elijah has indeed come, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him."

Now Peter, James, John, and Jesus walk down from their mountain experience and Jesus ordered them to not discuss this event with anyone else until the resurrection. Jesus did not want to feed the rumors about the return of the Messiah for the Jews had an improper understanding of the role that Jesus was to play as the real Messiah. The Jews were very much informed about a general resurrection but they were puzzled over this individual resurrection and what it meant. But they did not ask Jesus to elaborate on His resurrection and instead asked Him about Elijah whom they had just seen at the transfiguration experience. They would have known about the prophecy from Malachi: *"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."* (Mal 4:5-6) (Mat 3:2) They were probably still perplexed about the mission of Jesus that would involve His death and resurrection. If Elijah was to come to prepare all things for Him then why the suffering? The reply of Jesus is probably related to the suffering servant passage in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Jesus certainly meant that Elijah had come in the person of John the Baptist although his is not specifically mentioned by Jesus. Certainly restoring all things would involve leading the people to repentance, which is what was done by John the Baptist: *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* When Jesus replies "just as it is written of him" He is referring to the treatment of Elijah and his relationship with Ahab and Jezebel:

1 Kings 19:1-2 *"Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. "Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time."*

It seems then that the actions against John the Baptist by Herod and Herodias were foreshadowed by Ahab and Jezebel against Elijah.

Mark 9:14-18

When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. (15) Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and began running up to greet Him. (16) And He asked them, "What are you discussing with them?" (17) And one of the crowd answered Him, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; (18) and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it."

This is the last exorcism in Mark's gospel and he gives more details to it than do Matthew and Luke. The disciples were arguing with some scribes who had evidently been sent by the Pharisees to where Jesus was teaching far north of Palestine (if the transfiguration occurred at Mount Hermon). It seems that the very presence of Jesus evoked wonder among the people because of all that had been told and rumored about His teachings and miracles. Jesus immediately went to the source of the argument and the man who had brought his son to the disciples for removing of the evil spirit told Jesus the problem. We are not told exactly what the argument was about but the disciples were not successful in dealing with the demon although that was part of their charge and their early success:

- Mark 3:14-15 *And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, (15) and to have authority to cast out the demons.*
- Mark 6:13 *And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.*

The symptoms seem like epilepsy to us today but that is not to say that this was not a demon possession for that is the source Mark ascribes to the condition.

Mark 9:19-22

*And He *answered them and *said, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!" (20) They brought the boy to Him. When he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth. (21) And He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. (22) "It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!"*

The context implies that Jesus is speaking to His disciples as the "unbelieving generation". In asking how long He shall be with them infers that He longs to be with the Father rather than with them on earth among such unbelief. When He laments that He must put up with them He is referring to their continual display of unbelief and lack of faith. But He knows the source of faith and He knows that He must continue to encourage the disciples so He persists in His instructions to them (Mark 9:30-31; 14:28; 16:7). The boy was demon possessed for when they brought him to Jesus the demon threw the boy into a convulsion and foaming at the mouth. Jesus then wanted to access the state of mind of the father so He asked him how long the possession had been occurring. The father told Jesus that the boy had been possessed since childhood and that the

demon had tried to kill him by throwing him into fire and water. Evidently the father had become discouraged by the failure of the disciples so he asked Jesus to help if He could do anything.

Mark 9:23-29

And Jesus said to him, "If You can?' All things are possible to him who believes." (24) Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief." (25) When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again." (26) After crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, "He is dead!" (27) But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up. (28) When He came into the house, His disciples began questioning Him privately, "Why could we not drive it out?" (29) And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer."

Jesus seized upon the "if" clause of the father and replied that all is possible for the person who believes. Mark has a major emphasis on the role of faith in healing so he reports that Jesus seizes upon that element again. Jesus may be referring to the lack of faith of the father and determining if the father had faith for such a healing. The father showed that he did have faith as he cried out that he does believe and asks for help in any unbelief that he still had. The father is extremely honest as he admits that although he has faith he still needs help in receiving more faith. Belief is not the same as faith but it is a byproduct of having faith. Faith is the cause and belief and trust are the results or indicators of having faith. Jesus did not want to wait until the crowd became even larger so He immediately addressed the demon by his classification: deaf and mute spirit. Jesus commanded the spirit to leave the boy and to never return. For the boy to have such protection that the demon cannot enter him again implies the protection of the Holy Spirit that each Christian has but we are not told that the boy was saved.

The demon did not leave easily but put on a last show that left the boy in such bad shape that the crowd thought that he was dead. To demonstrate that the boy was now well, Jesus took him by the hand and raised him so he was able to stand. Although there is no affirmation that the boy had died, the dethroning of Satan is always a reference to death and resurrection to a new life. Perhaps Mark is making this point by following the mention of the death and resurrection of Jesus and the resuscitation of the daughter of Jairus with this event. The disciples wanted to know why they had failed and Jesus told them that prayer was required. Mark may be making the point that the disciples had become too complacent with their powers given them and thought that they possessed such abilities themselves and did not need the intervention of God through prayer.

Mark 9:30-32

From there they went out and began to go through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know about it. (31) For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later." (32) But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him.

Jesus was now through with His ministry in Galilee and wanted to remove His disciples from the crowds so that He could continue teaching them. He was revealing to them the mystery of salvation from God that involved Him being killed and resurrected three days later. Mark also records another element to this final action that involved someone delivering Jesus into the hands of men. Certainly there is a play on words here as the Son of Man will be delivered to man for the culmination of His work on earth. Of course Jesus is really delivered up by God the Father for this is the plan from before the foundation of the world (Rom 8:32). But the secondary source for the deliverance would be a man. Of course, in retrospect, we know that the man is Judas Iscariot. The disciples continued to show their unbelief and they were afraid to question Him further about it. We do not know why they were afraid but it could be because of the rebuke of Peter by Jesus (8:33) or because they could not understand the statement earlier about Elijah and they did not want to reveal their lack of understanding further to their master. Of course Jesus does not need them to verbalize for Him to understand what they are thinking but the topic was not further broached at this point. Instead we read further that they were focused on themselves!

Mark 9:33-35

*They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" (34) But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. (35) Sitting down, He called the twelve and *said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."*

Jesus wanted them to tell Him what they were discussing as they were on their way but they kept silent since they were discussing as to which of them was the greatest! The house is probably the one belonging to Peter and Andrew. They should have been ashamed of themselves for the basis of their discussions as they had just been informed of the horrors awaiting Jesus and themselves as His disciples. Their silence perhaps demonstrates that they were ashamed. By sitting down Jesus performed the actions of a Jewish rabbi (Matt 5:1; 13:1; Luke 5:3; John 8:2). True greatness is shown by the willingness to serve others. In that regard the statement by President Kennedy is appropriate: "Ask not what can be done for you but what you can do for others" (I have certainly not quoted it exactly). Many people have come to recognize the importance of servant leadership but few show it as their foundation. The servant requirement demonstrated by Jesus was the laying down of His life. The Bible often writes of such a servant responsibility spoken by Jesus:

- Mark 10:31 *"But many who are first will be last, and the last, first."*
- Mark 10:43-44 *"But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; (44) and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all."*
- Matt 23:8-11 *"But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. (9) "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. (10) "Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. (11) "But the greatest among you shall be your servant."*
- Luke 22:24-27 *And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. (25) And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' (26) "But it is not*

this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. (27) "For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

Mark 9:36-40

Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, (37) "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me." (38) John said to Him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us." (39) But Jesus said, "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. (40) "For he who is not against us is for us.

Jesus then illustrates His statement about greatness by choosing a child among them. The Aramaic for “child” and “servant” are the same so it does seem that Jesus is offering a pictorial parable. The disciples appeared jealous of this person who was able to cast out demons when they had failed in one case. They had a strict definition of who was with Jesus as being only those who were directly following Him. Jesus told them to not hinder him for it was likely that the person was showing true faith and time would tell. The person who persevered through tribulation to remain true to Jesus would never speak evil of Him. But at time would come when the principle would be: “*He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.*” (Matt 12:30) For just being able to even cast out demons is no proof that the person is known by Jesus:

Matt 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. (22) "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' (23) "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

The proof will be if the person perseveres through persecution.

Mark 9:41-44

"For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward. (42) "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. (43) "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, (44) [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.]

All assistance given to followers of Jesus Christ will be rewarded but this does not mean the gift of eternal life. All works of everyone will be judged and there will be rewards and punishments given to those being judged (1 Cor 3:11-15; 2 Cor 5:10). The word for “little ones” is not children but means followers of Christ and specifically those whose faith is just beginning. To cause a true believer of Christ to stumble is a sin directly against God who gave the faith to that person. Such an act will be greatly judged! Jesus then emphasizes the importance of removing

sin from our lives. He is not calling for literal removal of body parts but of total excising of spiritual sin that shows forth in the actions of the tongue and other parts. The word for hell is *gehinnom*, or Valley of Hinnom, and refers to a literal place that is representative of the eternal hell. This was a valley on the south side of Jerusalem that was used for the disposal and burning of human waste and animal carcasses. That fire never went out and was then used as a symbol of the real hell as described in Rev 20:14. Verses 44 and 46 were added by scribes to complete the parallelism in verses 47-48.

Mark 9:45-50

"If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell, (46) [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.] (47) "If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, (48) where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED. (49) "For everyone will be salted with fire. (50) "Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

Our feet can take us places that our born-again conscience knows we should not go so we must pay close attention to places that our sin nature wants us to go. Even after conversion our mind remains polluted with sin and wants to input some sort of sin that can come from the eye so it is critical to be transformed: *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."* (Rom 12:2) Salt is for preservation and fire is for purification so all Christians will be dealt their portion of persecution that results in purification for those who are disciples of Jesus Christ. I used to have a hard time with how salt can become unsalty for to me, a chemist, salt was some chloride such as NaCl and if it lost its identity it was something else. But in this time period salt was not pure NaCl but was polluted with dirt and other impurities so that in time the chemical salt would be lost from the total composition. From their perspective if the "salt" no longer acted as salt then it could not be revived. Jesus commands them to have the salt of preservation and purification active in themselves and then to be at peace with one another.