

A Study of Mark's Gospel

Week Twelve

Mark 8:22 – 9:10

Day One

22 They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. 23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" 24 He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." 25 Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. 26 Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village."

v. 22 – We are not sure where Bethsaida was located, although we know it was in Galilee on or around the lake. Most of Jesus' ministry took place well outside Jerusalem, for the authorities considered Him a subversive and wanted to kill Him. This was the second time that we see the people bringing someone to Jesus specifically so He could touch the man (see 7:31). The first man was deaf and dumb, but this man was blind.

The people had great faith in Jesus' ability to heal. They were also humble enough to "beg" and plead with Jesus to do this miracle. **What do you want and need Jesus to do for you? What do you need Him to do for someone close to you? Are you willing to beg Jesus to do so?**

v. 23 – As in the previous case, Jesus led the person away from the very people who had brought the blind man to Him. He had to distance Himself from anyone who did not have faith and to keep anyone from being offended or fascinated by what He was about to do. Once again Jesus used His spit as part of the healing process. **What was it about Jesus spit that made it such a critical part of the healing process in those two cases? Do you have any insight on this?** One commentator said that Jesus used His spit to separate the man's eyelids, which were dried out and crusted together. I'm not sure I accept that. **Do you have any other insight?**

v. 24 – Jesus asked the man if he saw anything and the man said that he saw people looking like trees. It seems that the man had seen before, otherwise he would not have known what trees looked like. I am not sure why the man did not receive his sight back all at once, but rather in stages. Or perhaps this was how the man's sight was when he was brought to Jesus. At any rate, Jesus did not leave the job partially done. When God does something, He does it well.

v. 25 – Don't hesitate to go back to God until you have the desired outcome; don't settle for anything except the answer that you need to your prayer. Jesus put His hand on the man a second time, specifically touching the man's eyes. This time the man's sight was completely restored. He got his eyesight back. What a magnificent gift! Jesus was not

intimidated by the nature or “size” of the miracle. It was all the same to Him. Don’t be afraid of the size of your need. God is bigger than anything you can bring Him!

v. 26 – Jesus sent the man away from the people who had brought him to Jesus. That is interesting. Jesus was not interested in starting a miracle crusade there. By the time the people would discover what had happened. Jesus planned on being gone. Jesus did not want or need to assemble a crowd at this stage of His ministry. He was already controversial enough!

Day Two

27 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" 28 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." 29 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." 30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

v. 27 – I have visited this region of Caesarea Philippi in Galilee and it is remote even today. It must have been even more so in Jesus’ time. I have to believe that, while Jesus ministered to the people in those remote regions, He was there to teach and train the twelve disciples. He probably had more with Him than just the twelve, for we know that He traveled with a team.

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means (Luke 8:1-3).

Not only did Jesus travel with a team, but there were women on the team! That must have been strange and even scandalous to the people of His day. **What has happened to the Church?** Jesus went out of His way to include women in what He did, but the Church too often goes out of its way to exclude women. The Church has limited its potential when we have done that, trying to achieve our mission with only half our members and half our gifts.

v. 28 – There were many strange theories of who Jesus was. There still are. Every year, especially at Easter, strange books appear, promising new insight into Jesus’ mission and person. One book recently declared that they had found Jesus’ family tomb and it revealed new insight into the person of Jesus, which was contrary to what Scripture depicted.

The issue, however, is never who does the public think that Jesus is. The question is: who do *you* think He is?

Peter was always the quickest to respond. He was accurate many times, sometimes he was off. He had the courage, however, to process the situation and speak quickly. In this case, Peter had insight from the Father and declared that Jesus was the Christ. Jesus did not deny the truth of Peter's statement. This is a serious issue right here. If Peter declared that Jesus was the Christ and He wasn't yet accepted the claim, then Jesus was a deceiver and everything else He said and did is declared invalid. Of course, Jesus was and is the Christ. My point is that this isn't a matter of debate. Jesus Himself declared that He was and is the Messiah. For anyone to believe anything else is to declare Jesus a liar and His mission bogus.

v. 29 – Jesus did not want this truth declared aloud in the streets. He was already in enough trouble with the authorities and He had more to do. There would be plenty of time to declare His Lordship; right then, He was on a mission that He had to accomplish. **Are you focused on your mission and purpose at the expense of other things?** If so, then you are following in the steps of Jesus, who kept the main thing the main thing.

Day Three

31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. 32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

v. 31 – Here we have Jesus' first mention of his suffering, death and resurrection in this gospel account. This was absolutely unthinkable to the disciples. Their concept of the Messiah was an invincible leader and king who would restore the literal kingdom of Israel as it was under David and Solomon. The thought of a suffering Messiah was and still is abhorrent. After all, it is written

If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:22-23).

How could God allow His Servant to become a curse when He was the source of blessing and life? It was unthinkable. The leaders would eventually all reject Jesus, yet later many would come to the faith, at least among the priests.

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7).

v. 32 – This teaching from Jesus was so off in the minds of the disciples that Peter took upon himself to pull Jesus aside and set Him straight. At least, Peter didn't do what he did in front of the others. He took Jesus aside, but still rebuked Him sternly. This

indicates that, while the disciples knew that Jesus was the Messiah, they did not know that He was God. Otherwise, how could Peter have felt free to rebuke Him? This is the kind of relationship Jesus had with those men. They could speak to Him openly and honestly. **Is that the kind of relationship you have with your leaders? Is that the kind of relationship you have developed with those you lead? Why or why not?**

Many are afraid that this kind of relationship will undermine the ability to lead. Obviously, it did not affect Jesus' ability. Later, we see this same dynamic present in the relationship between Peter and Paul.

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray (Galatians 2:11-13).

While painful and awkward, this kind of openness is absolutely essential for godly leadership. Since no one leader has all the insight and gifts, we must learn to submit to one another and not just to those "over" us in the Lord.

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:19-21).

v. 33 – While Peter rebuked privately. Jesus rebuked him in front of everyone else, probably because everyone else was thinking what Peter was thinking. Can you imagine Peter's shock to be addressed as Satan! This is how serious what Peter did was. It wasn't that Jesus rebuked him for rebuking Jesus. It was because he had so badly misinterpreted Jesus' sacred mission from the Father—to suffer and die on the cross. Peter wanted to try and prevent that, and that was the very reason Jesus came. So Jesus dealt with this rebuke in the strongest terms, because it was a potential roadblock to His purpose that He had encountered up to this point.

Are you that "ruthless" where purpose is concerned? Are you as focused, willing to deal with whatever tries to keep you from God's will for your life? I hope you are, for your purpose is God's will, His instructions from your heavenly headquarters. Don't let anything or anyone stand in the way of that.

Day Four

34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? 37 Or

what can a man give in exchange for his soul? 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

v. 34 – Once Jesus had finished rebuking His disciples, He turned to the crowd and once again turned the moment into a teaching opportunity. God is always in the teaching mode, taking our failures and turning them into learning experiences. We are never too old in the Lord to learn something new about God or about ourselves. **What have you been learning lately?** You may want to read through your journal to refresh your memory. **You don't have a journal?** You know the saying, "The problem with taking mental notes is that the ink fades so quickly." **If you aren't journaling, now would be a good time to start, don't you think?**

Jesus told His followers that, not only was He (Jesus) to have a cross, but all of them would have crosses, too! The cross wasn't just for the Master; it was also for the followers. Notice the active role the disciples had to take in this process. The disciple had to come after Jesus, deny himself, take up the cross willingly and follow Jesus. That's four separate acts of the will: 1) come after; 2) deny; 3) take up; and 4) follow. Those four steps weren't just one-time events; they were to be a lifestyle. **How are you doing with this four-step lifestyle?**

No one can make you take up your cross; only you can agree to pick it up and go where God is leading you with it on your back. For me, it's Church work. I've begged God to send me to the corporate world, and I have done some work in that field. Most of my work, however, is in the Church world, and that isn't my favorite place to function. Yet as I follow Jesus, that's where He leads me. So I willingly, not grudgingly, obey and do the best work I can do for Him, while being true to who I am and my purpose.

v. 35 – God put self-preservation in us as part of who we are. When a truck is heading toward us, we move out of the way. There is nothing wrong with that. But God is asking us to put such trust in Him that we can put our lives in His hands in order to follow Him and do His will. That is the only way for the true life that He gives, for our own efforts to save ourselves will work for the years we have breathe but not for eternity. If we are willing to put our life in God's hands, then we are true followers of Jesus.

Jesus said "whoever" wants to save his life. That means that this can be anyone, anywhere, of any age and either gender. Anyone can be a "whoever." The requirements are simple: Just follow the four-step process of come, deny, take up and follow.

vs. 36&37 – Many have ignored this simple truth to their eternal loss. They have gained the "whole world," however that may be defined, and have lost what mattered most. All humans were created to live forever. Where they will spend eternity is the key issue and those who choose to live now will live out of God's presence later, and those who choose to die now to God will live with Him forever.

Your “soul” is the most important aspect of your being. It is more important than your intellect, relationships, family and career. **Are you taking care of your soul? Are you looking after it, even if at the expense of the “life” you have in the world? Are you putting more effort into work, education or relationships than you are into your soul?** Jesus clearly stated what our priorities are to be. It’s now up to us to make sure we keep them in proper order.

v. 38 – Jesus made a easy-to-comprehend statement here. If *anyone* is ashamed of Him in the here and now, He will be ashamed of them in the life-to-be. **How can you be ashamed of Jesus?** I would think by being more concerned about what other people think than of what He thinks, allowing that thinking to affect our behavior. If my friends are misbehaving and I put a higher priority on what my friends think than on God’s will, and therefore condone or imitate their behavior, then I am in danger of fulfilling this verse.

Is there any part of your life where this verse may apply? Are you ashamed of any aspect of your life in Jesus, or of the people of God? Are you ashamed to worship God freely and openly for fear of what someone else may think?

Day Five

9:1 And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power." 2 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. 3 His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. 4 And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

9:1 – **What did Jesus mean by this?** He certainly did not mean that Israel’s kingdom would be restored, as some must have thought. **Does this verse tie into the story that Jesus had just told about denying self or does it apply to the next story of Jesus’ transfiguration?** In verse 38, Jesus mentioned His return with the holy angels for judgment. But then He changed gears, so to speak, to let them know that they were going to see something soon of God’s power that would usher in God’s kingdom. What happened next was part of that promise, for Jesus was about to have an encounter with heaven here on earth that would be witnessed by three of his closest followers. Let’s move on to that encounter.

v. 2 – Jesus handpicked who He took with Him. Why did He pick these three? I’m sure He had His reasons, but I don’t know what they are. I can only surmise that they would benefit most from what was about to happen. It could also be that it was God’s sovereign choice. At any rate, Jesus had to climb a high mountain to have this encounter with heaven. He did not want it to happen where the crowds could see. This reminds me of Moses going up the mountain to receive the commandments from God. Jesus was never interested in putting on a spiritual show.

v. 3 – This was truly an encounter with heaven. First, Jesus’ garments became whiter than any human could make them. It is interesting, but I’m not sure of what significance, that Jesus’ clothes were included in His glorification. I am thinking of the woman who touched His garment and was healed. I am thinking of those who were healed when they came in contact with Paul’s handkerchief (see Acts 19:12). Our spiritual power is perhaps greater than we have heretofore considered it to be. **Is there an aura about us that our relationship with God creates and is that aura capable of imparting blessing to those around us?** I don’t want to go too far with this thought. **Do you have any thoughts of your own on this?**

Of course, whiteness is a sign of purity and holiness and Jesus would have been “whiter” than any other human. His holiness was perfection; there would be no other “color” in His whiteness of purity. Jesus was sinless, yet human in every way. The world can only bleach things to make them white, representing human effort. Jesus was white by His very nature and no religious institution or system could produce such whiteness. He is above all. Jesus’ whiteness was dazzling to behold. I like that word. Jesus still dazzles His beholders.

v. 4 – Elijah and Moses appeared before Jesus and had a conversation with Him. Somehow the veil of heaven was turned back and those two giants of the Old Testament came to talk with their Lord. I wonder what they looked like? How did they know it was Moses and Elijah? Did Jesus tell them later. It is interesting that Elijah was taken up body and spirit into heaven and Moses was, too. Now they came to encourage Jesus in what He was about to experience. **I wonder if this kind of transfiguration had taken place before in Jesus’ life but there had been no one there to see it?**

When I read this, I think of all the science fiction movies that depict some kind of encounter with another alien world. I wonder if those movies aren’t speaking to man’s longing for contact with God and heavenly things, such as we see in this story. Our movies and mythology indicate how truly spiritual man is, but the weirdness of those expressions indicates to me that only Jesus can fulfill the spiritual longing that man has. Every other attempt ends in something less than divine. Jesus’ transfiguration is a close encounter with another world of the right kind; *Star Wars*, *ET* and other such creative, artistic expressions are misguided attempts to get in touch with that world. **Does that make sense?**

Day Six

5 Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." 6 (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) 7 Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

v. 5 – Peter was anxious to prolong this encounter, so he suggested that they build three shelters so that each one could have their own place. Then Peter declared that it was

good for them to be there. I suppose Peter felt that their presence could help prolong this spiritual encounter by providing a place for them to rest and reside.

This is indicative of our spiritual condition. God initiates something and we feel that we can do something to add to it, or perpetuate it, or systematize it. If Jesus would have wanted shelters, He could or would have asked for them. If God had wanted many of the things that we have “done” for Him, like buildings, programs, statutes or memorials, He would have asked for them, too. God isn’t interested in building monuments to past experiences; He wants us to pursue Him and thus generate new experiences.

v. 6 – Peter didn’t know what to say because he was so frightened, as were his companions. Again, this takes me back to the terrifying aspect of movies and mythology, trying to duplicate the natural fear we have when we encounter that spiritual world outside of the everyday world around us. I suppose I am saying that much of our entertainment is an attempt to capture some spiritual experience, which we were created to have. We just weren’t created to have them outside of God. **Does that make sense? If you can say or write it any better, or express or complete my thought any better, please feel free to do so.**

It is interesting that Peter didn’t know what to say, but he still said something. That was his style and why he was the spokesman for the group. He was the first to speak up and, more often than not, had something good or accurate to say. Here it would have been best to say nothing. *Lord, give me the wisdom to know when to speak and when not to speak.*

v. 7 – Notice that the voice didn’t say, “Listen to all three of those present.” No, the voice said to listen to Jesus. The prophetic ministries of Moses and Elijah were swallowed up and overshadowed by what Jesus had to say. Those two men were no longer the leaders of God’s covenant people, Jesus was (and is). It isn’t that those others have nothing to say. It’s simply that what they had to say must be reevaluated in light of Jesus’ message and mission. Everyone else in the Bible must take a lower role than Jesus. He is supreme.

The voice told those present to listen to Jesus. The voice didn’t say to worship or reverence Him. It didn’t say to honor and esteem Him. It said to *listen* to Him. That is good advice, except that it’s a command, not a suggestion. And the command still stands. If Buddha and Mohammed had been standing there, the voice would have said the same thing. If the world’s greatest leaders had been there with Jesus, the command would stand as expressed. Jesus is supreme! Listen to Him!

This once again addresses the mentality that there are many ways to God. If that was true, the voice would have said, “Some will listen to Moses and others to some prophet like Elijah. Then there will be some special ones who will listen to Jesus.” No, the voice established Jesus’ supremacy to any and all voices and personalities. **Can you accept this? Do you live your life like it’s true?**

Day Seven

8 Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. 9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. 10 They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.

v. 8 – As unexpectedly as the encounter started, it ended. Suddenly there were just the four of them and Jesus was the form to which they were accustomed. Notice that they did not try to make that mountain special or try to recapture a situation that could never be duplicated. They did not return to that mountain after Jesus' ascension for a pilgrimage.

I wonder if the disciples asked any questions? I wonder if they tried to find out exactly what had happened? After all, they questioned Jesus every chance they got on His teaching. I would certainly want some answers, or would I? They were so terrified that they didn't know what to say. Maybe they didn't know what to ask, or maybe they didn't want to know any more than they saw.

v. 9 – Jesus continued with his desire not to attract attention. He ordered them not to tell anyone about that experience until after He was raised from the dead. He was then talking of his death more frequently it seems. Then why were they so slow to believe His resurrection when it happened? That would be hard news to keep to one's self. They had just seen Jesus look an angel and had stood face to face with Moses and Elijah, and they couldn't even tell their wives.

Not all the spiritual truth you receive is to be shared with someone else. They may not be able to receive it. Some things may just be for you. I would have wanted to write a book from that experience, but the Lord wanted it a secret for the time being.

v. 10 – They did discuss the matter among themselves, especially trying to figure out what the resurrection talk was all about. This was foreign to their ears and, therefore, was incomprehensible. They had no foundation for such understanding, since this concept of Jesus dying and coming back was not comprehensible. They would only understand in the fullness of time.

Jesus was now on a "fast track" to Jerusalem, where His destiny with death was to be fulfilled. The disciples were on that track with Him and their lives, already radically changed, were in for more stretching and spiritual growth than they ever thought possible.