

Dr. Mark Jennings, Mark, Lecture 15, Mark 9:2-50, Transfiguration, Boy with Demon, Discipleship

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This is Dr. Mark Jennings in his teaching on the Gospel of Mark. This is session 15 on Mark 9:2-50, Transfiguration, Boy with Demon, Discipleship.

I'm happy to be with you again as we continue to work through the Gospel of Mark.

Today, we're getting into Mark chapter 9. Specifically, we'll be starting with verse 2. But as we begin to think about Mark chapter 9, the first incident we're going to look at is one of the more well-known, the Transfiguration of Jesus. As we work through the Transfiguration, we remember we're also working through this not as an event in and of itself but also how Mark has been preparing us for the Transfiguration and what the Transfiguration itself prepares us for. So, let's read the text, it's been our custom, and then discuss what's in there.

So, we begin with verse 2, and after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain by themselves and he was transfigured before them. And his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they talked with Jesus.

And Peter said to Jesus, Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, for he did not know what to say.

They were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, This is my beloved Son, listen to him. And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with him but Jesus only.

And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So, they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean. And they asked him, why do the scribes say that Elijah must come, that first Elijah must come? And he said to them, Elijah does come first to restore all things.

And how is it written of the Son of Man that he will suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him. When we come to the transfiguration here, one of the things that immediately stands out is there are some interesting parallels between this event and Moses going up on the mount. For example, Jesus takes disciples up with him.

He takes the three disciples here that we've come to know as part of his inner circle. Moses also goes up onto the mountain, and takes three unnamed figures with him, along with 70 others. Jesus is transfigured.

His clothes become radiantly white. Even Mark gives us this evidence about as white as it was impossible to make by bleaching. Moses' skin shines when he descends from the mountain after talking with God.

And both God appears in an overshadowing cloud. There is a theophany, if you will, in the Old Testament, but here as well. We even see some people being astonished.

The disciples are astonished at what has happened, and so are the people when they see Moses coming down. But there are, in the middle of these references and similarities to Moses, and there are a few more even; it's certainly a place in the sense of how the Mosaic moment is lesser than what is happening here with Jesus. So, as we think through this, I want to try to show some of these elements and how they play out.

You know, one of the things as we work through is, again, these first three, we've been accustomed, these are the ones who are allowed to see what happened to Jairus' daughter when she was dead. And they've seen that amazing miracle. Now they've seen this transfiguration.

These will also be the three that Jesus takes with him to Gethsemane a little bit further. As we think through what these three are seeing, we need to remember also that in terms of the confusion that these three are said to demonstrate, Peter is often as a spokesperson for the twelve, but even John later on will ask some questions that will show that they're seeing all these amazing things, but they're yet not so fully understanding. What's interesting is that as they're moving up into this mount, Mark tells us that Elijah with Moses and then Jesus with Moses were seen there talking with Jesus.

So here, Jesus has been transfigured, and he's in glory. Part of the idea is wondering if what they've actually seen is almost the true sense of the glory of Jesus, or has Jesus sometimes anticipated the glorious figure that he will be when he comes into glory? What is actually being seen? Regardless, it is this glory that is being seen. And you have Elijah and Moses.

Now the order is fascinating. Elijah with Moses. In fact, usually, as you would expect, it would be Moses with Elijah because of the primacy of Moses.

I think Mark puts Elijah first, whereas the others do not. Part of stressing the eschatological moment that is here is the conversation that Elijah has. But the fact

that Elijah and Moses are there shouldn't be a surprise, and we do need to ask the question, why those two? And I don't think the answer is because they represent the law and the prophets.

I don't think that's necessarily the answer or at least a full complete. Moses certainly would represent the law, but Elijah would be an odd choice for representing the prophets. He was a prophet.

But in terms of what we think of the law and the prophets, we usually think of the prophetic books that were written. So, one like Isaiah might have been more anticipated. Even then, it's not as clear because Moses is considered a prophet.

So, it's not as if Moses lacks the prophetic designation. In fact, Deuteronomy 18 speaks of the one who would come like the prophet Moses. And I think maybe that's where we start to understand some of the reasons why Elijah and Moses might be the ones here.

Both of them had a theophany experience on a mountain, no less. Both of them factor into the eschatological anticipation. Malachi 4:5 speaks of Elijah and Moses as Elijah's return.

And look forward to the days of Elijah. Deuteronomy 18 speaks forward for when the one who is a prophet like Moses would come. So, both Elijah and Moses are two figures that really speak to the hope of God's act, the eschatological event that was coming into play.

In fact, you get the sense by both of them being there that this anticipated climax now is at hand. And so, I think when we ask that question of why Elijah and Moses, it is because those two figures factor so significantly in the great plan now coming to the end. And those who would accompany him would be part of that eschatological reality.

Now, Peter's response I find very interesting. Peter also gets maligned for his response. I think, to some extent, he does as best as he can, perhaps in that moment.

First, Peter says to Jesus, Rabbi, and I don't think that Rabbi should be any indication of somehow not understanding. I mean, Jesus has been teaching. I think the Rabbi here is an acceptable designation.

He says, let us make three tents. So, you could also look at that as three booths or three tabernacles. One for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.

I think in some respects, we recognize that what Peter is doing first is seemingly making an incredibly high statement about Jesus. Here were Elijah and Moses, these

great figures from the past, now visible in the present. And Peter is counting Jesus among them.

Which is in itself a really amazing statement about Jesus. But I think also the booths is interesting because these tents, these tabernacles, it's hard not to think about the festival of booths here as part of Peter's thinking. The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated usually in September or October by our calendar after the Grape Harvest Festival and two months before the Dedication Festival.

It followed the Day of Atonement and marked the conclusion of the annual cycle of religious festivals. But what's fascinating, I think what's important to note, is this Feast of Tabernacles, what it does, and how it's presented throughout the scriptural story. It begins when you look at Leviticus and Numbers as a; we're calling for God's provision for the people in the wilderness, wanderings, where they lived in these tabernacles. But then it takes on in Nehemiah and then in Zechariah, more than just a remembrance of what occurred, but becomes a declaration of present dependence and trust in God, which becomes part of that festival that he will continue to meet.

That's how it sort of gets associated with this harvest idea, that he will continue to meet the needs of his people. But with the Zechariah aspects that get pulled in, there's a eschatological aspect to this festival as well. And suppose what I'm asking us to think about is when is this festival of booze carried almost the full story of God interacting and acting with his people from the Exodus event to the continual sustaining of the people to a forward future looking hope.

And I wonder then with Peter when he is saying, let us make three tents or tabernacles if he's trying his best to draw upon the greatest expression of past, present, and future in terms of Jewish festivals by saying, let us make three tents, let us do a tabernacle representation here. And so, there's part of me that when I think about Peter's response, I want to give him some credit for trying to figure out the best way to respond to this moment. But, of course, he misses some of the significance here.

For example, one of his mistakes is that he wants to make three instead of one. He's missing the significance that Elijah and Moses being there is in witness, if you will, in affirming what Jesus is doing. It is not Elijah, Moses, and Jesus, but it is Elijah and Moses bearing witness and testimony to what now is occurring with Jesus' arrival.

And I think the theme of stress, for example, is that even after the moment is over, the stress is on that there's still Jesus there, that Jesus remains, that there's a significance. But of course, the voice brings this in as well. So, you have Peter in verse 6, sort of just trying to figure out what to do.

He did not know what to say. He's terrified. And then, almost interrupting this scene is, a cloud overshadowed them and is this voice, this is my beloved son, an echo of Psalm 2 7. Now, this is not the first time we've had this occurrence happen in the Gospel of Mark.

This is very similar to the baptism, where the voice from the heavens and the heavens were split and ripped apart, and the divine testimony comes into this royal psalm declaring who Jesus is. And so we get that reminder that this is the significance of who is being imbued here. I also noticed that I think this idea of listening to him becomes important.

The father is endorsing, is advocating for the son's words. Now in this mosaic imagery, the mountain, the theophany, the bringing of the witness, those elements that we talked about before, you have Deuteronomy 18 15. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you.

This is Moses being the like me, from your brothers. It is to him you shall listen. And I think what we have here then is this clear declaration with listen to him that Jesus is this one that Moses spoke about in Deuteronomy 18.

It's hard to miss that. This then reminds us of what Mark has been stressing all the way through this: that Jesus had authority, unlike the scribes.

That the scribes debated and discussed what Moses meant. And here is the one who is even more important than Moses being affirmed to listen to him. And so, we have this scene and then as they're coming down the mountain, he tells the three not to tell anyone.

Not to tell anyone about this glorified transfiguration they have witnessed or that Moses or Elijah, until the son of man has risen from the dead. And so you even have there in this messianic secret this relationship that Jesus is willing to connect that I think what Moses and Elijah and God in the voice are affirming can only be fully and truly understood after the great son of man, Jesus resurrects. And so, you have these bringing together.

And even Jesus talking about resurrection here would be an eschatological understanding. And perhaps that's a bit why the disciples have some confusion. So, in verse 10, they kept the matter to themselves.

It's one of the few occasions where Jesus tells someone to be quiet about something, and they actually are. So, we want to give them credit. But questioning what the rising from the dead might mean.

And I think that's important for us to continue to remind ourselves is when we look at the disciples and they don't seem to get what Jesus is saying when he keeps talking about how he will rise again on the third day or the son of man must be risen. For them, the resurrection was not something that happened in the middle of history to one person. The resurrection was something that was supposed to happen at the end of history to the faithful people of God.

And so when they're sitting here talking about what do you think he means when he says that until the son of man had risen from the dead, it's because there's no place in their understanding of how things should play out in their mind that fits this. One, a resurrection being associated with the son of man doesn't fit. But also, a particular person rising from the dead, as opposed to the collective, would be something that they would be struggling with, and they wouldn't have the benefit that we have of looking backward into this and knowing what Jesus is talking about.

They did not. And I think we need to always recognize the difficulty that they would have had. Of course, with these references to resurrection, with these references to Elijah and this vision of Elijah, it's natural that they asked him about the role that Elijah plays in all of this.

Keep in mind that this question about Elijah's role also probably stems from the fact that there are people saying that Jesus is Elijah. We already saw that when Jesus asked the disciples, who do the crowds say that I am? And they replied, "Some say you're Elijah." So, the Elijah atmosphere is certainly right.

And so, they asked him, why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? Jesus' response is interesting. And actually, the logic, I think, sometimes is a bit hard to follow here. Jesus responds first by seeming to affirm what the scribes are saying, which is a rarity.

Jesus doesn't usually affirm the correctness of the scribes, but he says Elijah does come first to restore all things. Now, this idea that Elijah comes first to restore all things coming off Malachi 4:5, 6, which reads, see I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parents, or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.

Elijah's departure feeds into this mystery of his arrival, too, in 2 Kings 2:11 and how Elijah leaves. This question then becomes about Elijah coming first, and Jesus affirms it. He even says Elijah comes first to restore everything.

But yet, after making that statement and not even really defining what restoring all things means, he then issues a statement about the Son of Man. And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with

contempt? This was one of the points of debate. Jesus has been saying that it is necessary that the Son of Man be rejected by the leaders and be killed.

The disciples are having a hard time understanding how the great victory of the Son of Man can at all be connected with what seems to be such a horrible prediction. And I believe what Jesus is doing here is by saying, first affirming Elijah's statement but then connecting it with his teaching on the Son of Man is challenging the disciples to rethink what Elijah is coming to restore all things actually means. And he says in verse 13, but I tell you that Elijah has come.

This is seen as Jesus' reference that this Elijah figure was John the Baptist. John the Baptist is fulfilling this Elijah requirement. Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they please, as it is written of him.

This would be the connection between the two; this would be the statement about John the Baptist, who was executed by Herod Antipas. And so, in this statement, what Jesus is saying is that just as you must rethink the victory that the Son of Man brings, you must also rethink the Elijah forerunner and what that would look like. And so, if the restoration of all things is pointing towards the great victory over all things, but yet the great victory over all things is in suffering and death, then it makes sense that the restoration is also in similar garb.

The Elijah figure would suffer similarly; in other words, the great restoration of all things is to be understood in what Christ is accomplishing on the cross, and the great suffering of the Son of Man on the cross is indeed the great victory.

And Elijah, John the Baptist pointing towards that is the restoration. And that John the Baptist is preparing the people for the arrival. And so, I think this is how, what Jesus is trying to get them to understand here is the statement that Elijah does come first to restore all things is not incorrect, but that their understanding of that is incorrect.

We're going to see something similar even happen in Mark 13 when we get to that chapter. I want to continue here thinking through Mark chapter 9 and looking here at verses 14-29. And when they came to the disciples they saw a great crowd around them and scribes arguing with them.

And so, the scene is right, this is the returning to the disciples. And immediately all the crowd when they saw him were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked, what are you arguing about with them? And someone from the crowd said, Teacher, I brought my son to you for he has a spirit that makes him mute, and whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid.

So, I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able to. And he answered them, O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me. And they brought the boy to him, and when the spirit saw him immediately, it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth.

Jesus asked his father how long this had been happening to him. And he said, from childhood. And it has cast him into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.

And Jesus said to him, if you can, all things are possible for one who believes. Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, I believe, help my unbelief. And when Jesus saw that the crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit saying, you mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.

After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse. So most of them said he was dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could we not cast it out? And he said to them, This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer. They went on from there and passed through Galilee, and he did not want anyone to know. This passage in 14-29 is fascinating.

Fascinating. Because we've moved from this great moment of transfiguration back into the sort of everyday of Jesus' ministry, which is the disciples not getting something right or being confused and the need for help and aid in the demonic exorcism. We even have evidence that this demon has been around for a while since this boy's childhood and that he's destructive as we would expect.

We continually see the demons trying to be destructive, and here, this is something we have as well. He's trying to destroy the boy, throwing him into fire, throwing him into water. But what's interesting is there are two interactions.

First this first interaction is with this man, who is pleading for help. He's gone to the disciples, and they were not able to do it. We know the disciples have just come from a ministry experience where they were able to cast out demons. And then we have, and before Jesus turns to engage with the man, we have this rebuke by Jesus, O faithless generation, which, as we've talked about, I really believe that this negative generation language is to connect what is currently happening with the doubt of the Israelites that were wandering the wilderness.

So, I think this O faithless generation, this present generation has unbelief. But then he turns into this with this father and the father who's made the muscular act, if you will, of trying to get this boy to Jesus, he asks the question, but if you can do anything, help us. And Jesus is indignant at that response and it's the if you can language.

This is in stark contrast to if you are willing, I will be clean. Here is if you can, please do this. The if you can language indicates that the man has some concern that Jesus' power may be sufficient enough.

And the reason he has this concern is because the disciples have shown themselves to be insufficient to the task. And so, this inability of the disciples has now been transferred over to a concern over inability of Jesus. And so the challenge Jesus gives back to him is with all things are possible for one who believes is a challenge to show faith.

We've seen this through Mark: Jesus wants a muscular response, a clear response of faith in Jesus before he will perform the miracle. If one does not believe that Jesus can do this, then Jesus does not do this. That's the pattern we've been seeing in Mark.

And then we have, I think, probably one of the greatest statements about faith—a statement that really encapsulates the right response. The father or the child cries out two things.

One, I believe. Well, that in and of itself could simply be a response to, oh, I do believe. But it's the second statement that perhaps shows even more faith.

Help my unbelief. It is this humble recognition that there is a lack of faith there. But that that lack of faith is his own weakness.

And that Christ is the one who can grow and solidify the faith. And indeed, this is a great cry I think of discipleship that the disciples themselves are not getting.

We're going to see play out how often the disciples are quite confident in their abilities. They show a lack of concern over inabilities. In fact, some of their boasting that happens later on regarding who will be great and who will be greatest or even Peter when we get to the final of the Passion Week and his bold declaration that if everyone else falls away he will stay with Jesus till the end.

That they work in this sort of boldness statement and perhaps what they need is help my unbelief. And so, Jesus then receives this statement as evidence of faith. And he rebukes the unclean spirit.

There is a command there and an immediacy of that command. Now, that is what we would expect. Now, this whole moment actually seems like something we've seen earlier in the Gospel that characterized the first eight chapters, if you will.

But we are in this section on teaching where the attention from Caesarea Philippi has been Jesus teaching the disciples. And one of the things that does stand out in this element is the teaching aspect that occurs. So, we have after the exorcism, we have him sort of entering the house and having this discussion with the disciples privately.

This is looking here at verse 28 where they're asking, why could we not cast it out? And the response is interesting. This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer. So, the question of course is why they could not do it but yet Jesus could.

And the heart of the disciples failure may be part of the answer is in this response to Jesus. Jesus says this could only be cast out by prayer. And I don't think what he means is a specific formula or saying.

But rather, it's that posture of prayer, that dependence that prayer is. Prayer is when one turns their face to a God in a declaration that God is the creator and we are created, that God is the one who designs and directs, and we don't have anything to contribute on our own. And maybe we're getting this hint when Jesus responds by this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer that the disciples were beginning to think about more what they were able to do on their own rather than realizing a need for the power of God in this.

So, the response I find interesting. I want to quickly begin moving on here and maybe finish out chapter 9 if we could. So, I'd like to look at verses 30 through 50.

They went off in there and passed through Galilee and he did not want anyone to know for he was teaching his disciples saying to them, the son of man is going to be delivered into the hands of men and they will kill him and when he is killed after three days he will rise. But they did not understand the saying and were afraid to ask. I want to talk a little bit about those two verses.

One of the things that we notice here in these two verses is that we have our next passion prediction. We've been seeing Jesus do this. This is our next one in verse 31.

And so here we also have a reason for the Messianic secret if you will in this aspect that he's telling the disciples not to tell anyone about what they know because he has teaching he wants to do. And if the spread continues of his popularity it might prevent or at least make difficult some of this teaching. And so, he predicts he's going to be delivered.

One thing I think is important to note here is he's going to be delivered into the hands of men. I think the hands of men might indicate in this prediction who is doing the delivering. This isn't a delivering from one group of men to another group of men.

Notice that this isn't handed over to the rulers or judges or leaders by a particular group. It's into the hands of men. And I think what we're seeing here in verse 31 is that God is the one who is actually delivering the Son of Man to the hands of men.

I think that's the idea behind it that God is doing this delivering. And this would actually fit with what is said of the suffering servant in Isaiah. He is said to be delivered over.

Paul will use very similar language about delivering where God is the one who delivers the hands over. And so, we're getting I think a hint at the divine orchestration of the passion as well. And they will kill him.

Again, I think the evidence that this is not a creation of the early church is the language of killing him instead of crucifying him, which is what one would have expected if it was an insertion into the scene. And when he is killed after three days, he will rise. And then, in verse 33, they came out to Capernaum, which is not a surprise.

This is usually where when he's his home base when he's in Galilee. And when he was in the house, he asked them, what were you discussing on the way? Verse 34 is interesting that they kept silent. And I think, as we're starting to see, disciples often keep silent when they know that there's some embarrassment or shame associated with it.

But they kept silent for on the way they argued with one another about who was the greatest. Now this argument with one another about who was the greatest seems especially egotistical in a 21st century Western context. But keep in mind in the ancient world where everything was understood in honor and shame, that they would be boasting in themselves a little bit about who would be in what status wouldn't have been as uncommon.

And Jesus clearly speaks against it. But that they were doing that would be reflective of that culture where everything seemed to be a competition. Now so they realize that this is inappropriate.

I think that's why they kept silent. That they've been listening enough to Jesus teaching to know that what they were arguing over is probably something he won't agree with. And indeed, he does make this a teaching moment.

He sat down and called the 12 that had that idea of seating, who had the idea that now there was going to be a lesson on it. And he said to them, if anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all. And so, this is the teaching objective, if you will, that the rest of it is going to follow.

This is the main idea, sort of this reversal of how you understand status. Whoever receives one such, and he took a child and put him in the midst of them and taking him in his arms, he said, whoever receives one such child in my name receives me. And whoever receives me receives not me, but him who sent me.

Now I want to just finish there, and we may have time to do the rest of the nine. If not, we'll pick it up at the next lesson. I'm sure we'll pick it up at the next lesson.

But I think what we need to realize is what's happening here in terms of what a child is in the ancient world and a little bit to how we think naturally of a child. When we think of a child, especially in the West, we tend to think of a child as the perfect display of innocence, of having been untainted, of potential, ready. In a lot of ways, a child in the ancient world wasn't thought of in similar ways culturally.

I'm not talking about a father and a wife and their care for their son or daughter, but children, in general, were a group that lacked status. Children were a group that had no sort of social significance if you will. They were dependent; they were weak, and they were unable to contribute.

And so, when we look, Jesus has said, he's talking about this distinction between this argument the disciples are having about who's going to be the greatest, and to display the importance of this reversal of first and last, he picks not something innocent, but something of low status and low value. The child becomes the perfect example of the expression of a lower wing in the honor, shame category, if you will, as the world would understand it. And so, what he says is, whoever receives one such child, and I don't think this means whoever receives children, but I think the child here is the metaphor, perhaps is the best way of putting it, or the symbol.

Whoever sees one such low status, whoever doesn't think status in my name, and I think the in my name reference here is interesting. Does it go to the receiving, or does it go to the child? That's one of the debates. Is it whoever in my name or receives in my name one such child, or is it whoever receives one such child in my name, meaning the in my name associated with the child?

I think the sense of it here might be to associate the in my name language with a child. In other words, whoever receives a low-status person who is a follower of mine, who claims to belong to me, receives me. This is much closer to what we've usually seen Jesus say about how the reception of the followers of Jesus is the reception of Jesus.

And to reject the followers of Jesus is to reject him. To reject the message that the disciples are carrying is to reject the one who the message proclaims. Jesus continually interweaves throughout his teaching the connection between the reception and rejection of his followers and the reception and rejection of him.

And I think this is what's happening in this context. That what Jesus is saying, whoever receives the lowliest of people in social status world, but who claim to be a follower of mine, they are receiving me. They are receiving the Messiah.

And conversely, whoever receives me, whoever says yes, I welcome Jesus into my presence, receives not me, but the one who sent me, right here being a reference to the Father. As we work through thinking about children and metaphor, I want us to keep that in mind because I think what we're going to see this play out is that it's about social status, not about purity, innocence, and potential. I want to pick up the rest of chapter 9 and as we move into chapter 10 the next time.

Thank you.

This is Dr. Mark Jennings in his teaching on the Gospel of Mark. This is session 15 on Mark 9:2-50, Transfiguration, Boy with Demon, Discipleship.