

MARK 9:1-29 – “I BELIEVE; HELP MY UNBELIEF!”

Today is Palm Sunday. What does that celebrate? What is the big deal about Palm Sunday? The entry into Jerusalem by Jesus, right? The people threw the palm branches down. He was riding the donkey's colt. That is significant because the image that the Jews had of the Messiah during the time of Christ was that God was going to raise up this person who was going to be a descendant of King David who would bring deliverance from their Gentile enemies. He would restore the Temple. He would re-establish the kingdom rule of David in Jerusalem. So, the Jews were expecting a political Messiah. When they saw Jesus riding in, they said, "Hosanna!" They were praising Him as the king who was about to set up His kingdom. They were recognizing Him as the Messiah. That is what was happening on Palm Sunday. Of course, we know that less than a week later they ended up killing Him.

But now, as we go through Mark's Gospel that is still the expectation of the Messiah. As Jesus begins to reveal Himself to His disciples and to His extended group of followers, that is what they are expecting. I can just hear the disciples now vying for the various cabinet positions that will be available when Jesus rules.

Last time we left off with Mark Chapter 8. Jesus asked His twelve disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Good ole Peter responded on behalf of the group and declared correctly, "You are the Christ." In other words, "You are the Messiah. We recognize that." Jesus then throws His disciples a spiritual curve ball. He says something they were not expecting to hear. "[Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man [speaking of Himself in the third person] must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again." Did you hear that? "After three days rise again." And then it says in the passage, and only Mark adds this: "And He said that plainly" (Mark 8:31-32). They understood that. They must have forgotten it later, but they understood it now. The disciples clearly understood what Jesus said.

He has just revealed (the lesson from last time) His mysterious mission. He finally revealed it and is a mission of redemption. The disciples must have been surprised by what they heard. Jesus then, later in the chapter, turns to the crowd that is standing around outside and said to them, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me" (Mark 8:34). Not exactly the news that the Jews wanted to hear.

Jesus's twelve disciples and many of His other followers were expecting Jesus to soon head into Jerusalem and establish His kingdom and rule from there. That's what the prophets in the Old Testament seemed to have indicated would happen. So, they are thinking earthly kingdom right now. But here is Jesus and He is talking about suffering and dying! You can understand the mindset of the disciples by the time you get to the end of Mark Chapter 8. They know what Jesus said, but they are not quite sure what it all means. So, with that as a backdrop, let's get into Chapter 9.

READ Mark 9:1

In Matthew's account he quotes Jesus here as saying, "there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" (Matthew 16:28). Now THIS is more like it! This is what the disciples want to hear! They want to hear more about His kingdom and less about His death! They are still thinking that Jesus will soon be setting up His kingdom!

So, I know that Q1 is supposed to be answered first, but I want to go to Q2 first... What did Jesus tell some standing there they would see before they died? That they would see the kingdom of God, right? Coming with power. That sounds really exciting!

READ Mark 9:2a

Q3, who did Jesus take with Him? James, John and Peter. Those become familiar as you read through the Gospels. These are the three disciples who are the closest to Jesus. He takes them with Him up to a high mountain. Now, we don't know what mountain it was. There is a lot of

debate about that. But it never tells us. I have my opinion. Other people have theirs. But we do not know for sure, so it doesn't really matter. Jesus takes three trustworthy witnesses who will attest to what they will see. There is a good reason for this. It comes from the book of Deuteronomy. There is a need for two or three witnesses in order to avoid giving false testimony, to corroborate the witness of others. In other words, you cannot be convicted, let's say to die, by the witness of one person. You need two or three witnesses at least. That is a good rule to have. So, Jesus is taking some witnesses with Him of what they are about to see.

READ Mark 9:2b-3

The word "transfigured" means to be transformed into something more beautiful. That is a big word. We do not often hear the definition of it. We just see it mentioned in the scripture.

So, what is the answer to Q1? What event is described here? The Transfiguration. Matthew adds that "[Jesus's] face shone like the sun" (Matthew 17:2). His divine glory is manifested in bright light. John MacArthur says that when Jesus came to earth "He took the veil of humanity and clothed His glory." Jesus, who is God, displays here His unveiled glory in brilliance and beauty.

In the Bible, the presence of God is often manifested in the form of light. The Hebrew word for this is *Shekinah* (which means "dwelling"). You may have heard the expression, "the Shekinah glory of God." It is very interesting that the first thing that God created in His physical universe was light (Genesis 1:3). Even before He made the sun, moon and stars, God created light. Moses's face shown when he came down from Mount Sinai and he had to put a veil over his face. (Exodus 34:29-35). What made his face shine? He had been in the presence of God. The glory of God, the light, was so bright that the residual of that light made Moses's face glow. The people were frightened. Then you have this presence of God that is in the tabernacle (Exodus 40). It is the glory of God that filled the tabernacle. And then you have the glory of God filling Solomon's temple (2 Chronicles

5). God's presence was so overwhelming, it says, that the priests could not even stand to minister – so overwhelming, God's glory. On a hillside outside of Bethlehem when the angels announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds it says "the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear" (Luke 2:9). Saul on the Damascus Road, what did he see when he heard the voice of Jesus? What was it? It was a bright light. It knocked him off his horse to the ground. He fell to the ground. On the island of Patmos when our Lord appeared to the Apostle John, John describes the appearance of Jesus like this – he says, "His face was like the sun shining in full strength" (Revelation 1:16). Then you have Revelation 21 which talks about a new heaven and a new earth. It says that in the new holy city of Jerusalem it "has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light..." (Revelation 21:23). Here in this passage that we are reading in Mark Chapter 9, we see again the Shekinah glory of God on display.

READ Mark 9:4

So, Jesus is joined by two others – Moses and Elijah. Q4, why Moses and Elijah? What do they represent? Moses represents the Law, right? And Elijah the Prophets. The Law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai and then Elijah was a guardian of it. He had great zeal for the Law. So, those two men represent the Law and the Prophets. In John 1:45 Philip declares "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth. Moses and Elijah, they represent the Old Testament Law and Prophets while Jesus represents (we see this later in the book of Hebrews) the new covenant, the New Testament.

One of the questions that gets asked when people read this passage is "How do the disciples know that these two men are Moses and Elijah?" It is a really good question because Moses died 14 centuries before. Elijah was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot some 9 centuries earlier. They did not have cameras with photographic equipment to take their pictures for people to figure out what they look like. These guys have been long gone and have not been back at all for centuries. So, how would they know who

these guys are? Well, I always (jokingly) when it comes up, “how did they know?” I say, “Well, they had name tags.” Maybe the Holy Spirit revealed this to them. Maybe their names came up in the course of conversation with Jesus. That is probably very likely. Maybe Jesus introduced them to the disciples: “I would like you to meet Moses and Elijah.” Somehow, they knew. The scripture does not say how. But they did.

READ Mark 9:5-6

Q5, what does Peter suggest they erect for Jesus, Moses and Elijah? Three what? Tabernacles (KJV, NKJV, NASB); Tents (ESV, AMP); Shelters (NIV, NLT, NET); or Booths (RSV).

This sounds like a crazy thing for Peter to say, doesn't it? When I introduced the Gospel of Mark back at the beginning of our study, one of the things I pointed out is that Bible scholars believe that the events Mark is recording are from Peter's perspective. So, v 6 makes sense (Mark is the only one of the Gospel writers that adds this). He is explaining why Peter said what he did – he didn't know what to say!

In Peter's defense, there is actually a reasonable, rational explanation for him to suggest making three tents or tabernacles or shelters. Here you have Jesus in all of His divine glory. He is getting ready to set up His kingdom (or so they think). You have Elijah here and we know that Malachi mentions that Elijah must come as forerunner of the Messiah (Malachi 4:5-6). You have Moses, the greatest figure in Israel's history. And coming up very soon on the Jewish calendar – and this would have been on Peter's mind – is the biggest Jewish celebration of the year, which is, the Feast of Tabernacles. We always think about the Passover, but really the Feast of Tabernacles was their big deal. That is when they would build these little shelters to commemorate what happened in the wilderness following their release from Egyptian captivity. So, Peter is basically suggesting, “Hey, Jesus, why don't we just celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles right here, right now!” It kind of makes sense, doesn't it?

READ Mark 9:7

So, there you have the answer to Q6, what does the audible voice say? "This is My dearly loved Son. Listen to Him!" The voice is, of course, the voice of God the Father who testifies as to who Jesus is. This is one of three times that happens in the New Testament. The cloud harkens back to the cloud that represented God's presence on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24). We see the cloud imagery again later in Revelation (Revelation 14).

In Matthew's account it says, "When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified" (Matthew 17:6). They were terrified by the voice they heard. Being in the very presence of God fills them with a sense of awe and panic, fear, great emotion. That is understandable. In the Bible it was normal for people to be overcome by God's holiness, His presence. Isaiah in Isaiah Chapter 6, Ezekiel in Ezekiel Chapter 1, and John in Revelation Chapter 1 all had the same reaction being in the presence of God.

Jesus reassures the disciples and He calms their fears.

READ Mark 9:8

The disciples get up and look around. Moses and Elijah are gone. It's just Jesus there and He's back to His normal appearance. Wow! What an amazing experience! I'm sure that many thoughts ran through their minds, but I can tell you this – one of them was, "I can't wait to tell the other disciples about this! This is something else!"

READ Mark 9:9

Jesus pours a little cold water on their enthusiasm. Q7, while coming down the mountain Jesus charges His disciples not to say anything about what they had seen – until when? Until He [Jesus, the Son of Man] has been resurrected from the dead. There He goes talking about dying again. But He is also talking about being resurrected.

Jesus knows that the Jewish people have a pre-conceived expectation of the Messiah. We see that on Palm Sunday, don't we? "The king has come! He is here!" They do not understand, the disciples did not

understand His redemptive mission. The first coming was not to rule on the earth, right? It was to redeem sinful mankind. Everyone, including Jesus's own disciples, are thinking political Messiah. "The kingdom now!" That is what they are all thinking.

You know, it must have been really hard on Peter, James and John not being able to say anything about what they saw because they were pretty excited. Q8, true or false, the disciples could not remain quiet and told everyone. False. Just look at the next verse...

READ Mark 9:10

So, the three disciples who had been with Jesus – Peter, James and John – DID keep quiet about what they saw. They did not say anything even though they wanted to. However, they are still confused by what Jesus means by rising from the dead. The whole idea of Jesus dying is not registering with them. Not yet.

READ Mark 9:11-13

Q9, true or false, the disciples understood what Jesus was saying in these verses. Matthew 17:13 tells us that they understood that Jesus was talking about Elijah coming and was talking about John the Baptist. So, they understood the prophecy that was in Malachi about this Elijah guy and that John was the fulfillment of that. So, the answer to Q9 would be TRUE. They DID understand about this. When we read these verses here, we have to get our commentaries out because we don't fully understand what all of this is about. But they did.

Jesus knows that less than a year from now He will go to the cross. He will suffer and die and be resurrected. He knows this and has been telling His disciples this. Jesus knows that the Jewish people and their leaders are going to reject Him as their Messiah. It did not come as a surprise to Him. They are going to have Him put to death. That did not surprise Him either. Jesus has been telling His disciples all of this. Full disclosure. But they just don't get it yet. They are wrestling with, "what is He saying, what is He talking about dying?"

READ Mark 9:14

So, the other nine disciples that stayed behind are down there and they are arguing with the scribes. That is what they see – this chaotic scene taking place. Peter, James and John now meet up with the other nine disciples; all this yelling and screaming and arguing going on. There is this crowd of people around. Q10 asks, what were they arguing about? We don't know because it does not say. Jesus begins to ask what they are arguing about and before He can get an answer, somebody interrupts.

As they approach, the crowd spots Jesus. Look at their reaction...

READ Mark 9:15-16

It says that the crowd was greatly amazed, ran up and greeted Him. Jesus is a celebrity, even up there in the northern part of Israel. These people are awestruck by Him. They are rushing to where Jesus is.

READ Mark 9:17-18

In Matthew's account this "someone" is a man who falls to his knees in desperation and implores Jesus, "Have mercy on my son." (Matthew 17:14-15). Q11, what did the father of this boy complain about that Jesus's disciples could not do for his son? They could not drive out a demon that robbed his son of his ability to speak. He had apparently brought his demon-possessed son to the disciples earlier and had asked them to cast the demon out. But they could not do it.

READ Mark 9:19

Q12, to WHOM was Jesus's rebuke, "O faithless generation..."? The disciples. Some commentaries I read suggest that by saying, "O faithless generation" (a generic broad-sweeping term) Jesus is addressing everyone here – the crowd, the scribes, the boy's father and the disciples. So, I guess you are not wrong if you answered any of those. But I believe that Jesus is primarily (that is the key word here in the question) directing His remarks at those nine disciples for their lack of faith. Here is why I say that. I am going to defend myself here. Jesus has invested, up to this

point, two years with these guys. He expects their faith to have deepened. He is disappointed in them. He had given them power and authority over demons (Mark 6:7), right? We read about that. Then right after He gave them power and authority over demons, He sent them out on a little mission trip, right? And what did they do? They cast out demons (Mark 6:13). So, you get a real sense of Jesus's frustration with His disciples here. John MacArthur refers to this as "a holy exasperation." You see some real human emotion.

So, Jesus says, "Bring the boy to Me."

By the way, I really find a great deal of encouragement in passages like this one that show the humanity of the disciples. We can relate to them. They are not perfect, not by a long shot, and neither are we. Yet God used them in a mighty way to further His kingdom. We know that from reading our Bibles, don't we? And if He can use them, He can use us. But ten of these guys will become martyrs for Christ, for the Gospel's sake. So, these are amazing men, but they are showing their humanity here. I love it when the Bible is honest about these characters and shows that they are not perfect.

READ Mark 9:20-22

This particular demon had been trying to destroy the boy by various means. This has been going on his entire life. We don't know how old the boy is, but it has probably been going on for several years. He says, "Jesus, have compassion on my son!"

The man's request is "IF You can do anything, help us." This sounds a lot like some of my own prayers. "Lord, if You can do such and such, I am asking You to please do it." Of course, Jesus is quick to correct this man's faulty theology.

READ Mark 9:23

Why is this even a question? If you can? The question is not whether God CAN or not. The question is only whether it is His WILL or not. Jesus

indicates that, in this case, He will heal the boy if the man believes that He can. It is important to point out something here because every case is different. Though Jesus has often healed people apart from the faith of those involved (we have seen some of that already in Mark), in this particular case Jesus chooses to emphasize the power of faith. Jesus makes an important statement – “All things are possible” for WHO? “For one who believes.”

READ Mark 9:24

This is an honest expression to Jesus. The man admits to Jesus that, while he DOES have faith, it is not a perfect faith. I can relate. He says, “Jesus, I believe You can do it, but I admit I do have some doubts.” Please come and dispel my doubts.” Does Jesus require us to have perfect faith? No. We know this by what happens next.

READ Mark 9:25-27

The boy was not dead. He just looked that way. At Jesus’s command the demon comes out, although it does not come out quietly.

Q13, true or false, Jesus healed the boy only after the boy’s father professed his total belief that Jesus could heal his son. Total belief? The man admitted that he had some doubts, did he not? That is certainly not total belief. That is good news for us, isn’t it? “Help my unbelief.” And still, Jesus healed his son. So, the answer is false. That is encouraging, isn’t it?

Well, this story concludes with a lesson for the disciples (and for us). Look at the last couple of verses...

READ Mark 9:28-29

I have to give the disciples some credit here. They ask the right question. They realize that they were lacking something and they want to know what it is. Q14, how did Jesus say that this particular kind of demon could be cast out? What was missing? Prayer. John MacArthur says, “Prayer is the highway that faith takes into the power of God.”

The lesson taught by our Lord here is not how to cast out demons, but rather how to access the power of God. In our prayers we approach God humbly and we admit that we are powerless. "We cannot do it God. We need You." We depend completely upon Him to accomplish His perfect plan and His purposes – whatever they might be – in whatever situation that we find ourselves in. Now, we know what we want, but we are going to trust Him to do what is in His will to do and trust that He has the power to do it. We cannot fix it.

In closing, we do not need more faith. We do not need perfect faith. We do not need mature faith (it would be nice). The only thing we need is faith in the right Person. That Person is not myself and it is not you, as wonderful as you might be. It is not your counselor. It is not the President of the United States or any other political figure. It is not your pastor. It is not your spouse, as wonderful as they might be. That Person is Jesus.

My dad's favorite verse was Galatians 2:20, so I want to honor him with this verse. **"I have been crucified with Christ."** Now, that was last week's lesson; pick up your cross and follow Him, right? Die to yourself. **"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith..."** Faith in who? **"faith in the Son of God..."** Who is that? Jesus. **"...who loved me and gave Himself for me."**

Jesus is on His way to complete His mission, a mission of redemption, which will require His sacrificial death on the cross. He will soon be on His way. That is what He did for us. The disciples do not understand it yet. They will in time. We do. We look back and we can see it all. But they are not there yet.