

Mark 9 • Opening the Apostles' Eyes

Introduction

Here's the bad news: Even the apostles didn't fully understand nor interpret correctly all of the signs associated with Christ's coming. But here's the good news: Just as Christ taught them the correct meaning, so He will teach those obedient to His Word and ways. The disciples of Jesus' day experienced the very same problem which every generation of Believer has experienced to this very day – they needed to learn and personally apply the more important message that the signs represent. Every physical condition and remedy represented a parallel spiritual condition and remedy. Being in the presence of even the greatest signs and wonders from the very hand of God are completely useless without learning and applying the greater message they represent.

²Six 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; ³and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. ⁴Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵Peter 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." ⁶For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified.

⁷Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!"

⁸All at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone.

⁹As 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.

¹⁰They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant. ¹¹They asked Him, saying, "Why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

¹²And 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? ¹³But I say to you that Elijah has indeed come, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him."

[Read v.2-13]

Q: What are the two miracle healings Mark records leading up to this chapter?

A: The healing of the blind man in the area of the Decapolis (Mk. 7:31-37) and the healing of the blind man in Bethsaida (Mk 8:22-26).

Q: What is the challenge Jesus makes to the disciples just prior to this event when they're in the boat discussing the "leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod"? (Mk. 8:14-21)

A: "Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear?"

Point: The physical conditions mirror the spiritual conditions. Just as Jesus healed the physically blind who came to Him, so He is about to heal the spiritually blind to see Him clearly.

Q: What do Elijah and Moses represent?

1. Moses represents the Law and Elijah the prophets. It's a picture of the entire Word of God being fulfilled in Christ.
2. Moses was the first prophet of the Old Testament age and Elijah, in the form of John the Baptist, was the last prophet of the Old Testament age, which is yet another picture of the entire Word of God being fulfilled in Christ.
3. It's the fulfillment of a Jewish tradition that held – and still holds to this day – that Moses and Elijah will return together in conjunction with the coming of the Messiah. From the Jewish point of view, it's a picture of what we call the Second Coming when the Messiah will establish His kingdom on earth.
4. They probably represent the two witnesses who appear in anticipation of Christ's return as spoken of in Scripture. (Rev. 11:3) This is a partial fulfillment of their final appearance to come.
5. Moses represents all Believers who physically die but will be resurrected, Elijah represents all Believers who will be "translated" or "raptured" directly from their physical form to their new, heavenly form. For both types of Believers, the end result is the same.

Q: What might be the greater meaning of Jesus appearing with, but separate from, Moses and Elijah?

A: It indicates that Christ is distinct and separate from the Law and Prophets, they being in full agreement with, and fulfilled completely in, Christ.

Q: How do we absolutely know this for sure from this passage?

A: God Himself identifies Christ not as prophet like Elijah nor a servant like Moses, but by stating, "This is My beloved Son".

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Q: But how does Peter interpret all these things? What is the meaning of his suggestion to “make three tabernacles”?

A: Peter believes he is seeing the fulfillment of what we now know to be Jesus' Second Coming, the establishment of His kingdom on earth. This is most notably represented in Judaism by the “Feast of Booths”, something which not only teaches about the Millennial Reign, but is the one feast which will continue to be celebrated in the Millennial Reign. It's a time when booths, or “tabernacles”, are erected and lived in for a week. Peter sees many things which he knows are associated with the Messiah coming as a conquering King to begin reigning on earth, and assumes it all means that it's beginning to be fulfilled at that very instant.

Q: But what is the piece of the puzzle Peter ignored which put all of this into the proper perspective?

A: Peter's not fully listening and misses the import of the fact that Elijah and Moses “were talking with Jesus” and what they were talking about. In Luke's account it makes clear that they were talking about Christ's departure, not His remaining.

And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Luke 9:30-31

Point: *The cross is the theme of heaven's conversation as well as heaven's praise. (See Revelation 5.) The cross comes first and is the thing which enables everything else to come.*

Q: What was the net effect of their seeing these things combined with personally hearing God's commandment, “listen to Him”?

A: It addresses Jesus' previous question in chapter 8, “Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear?” and Peter's missing the point of the conversation with Elijah and Moses. Their misperceptions are being replaced by the correct interpretation of the Messiah's First and Second Coming.

Q: How does Moses' and Elijah's presence confirm this commandment of God to “listen to Him”?

A: This is the exact command Moses gave concerning the Messiah – “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.” (Dt. 18:15) – as well as through John the Baptist's ministry in the power and spirit of Elijah.

Point: *Whenever you see the word “listen” in the Bible, it never refers to just hearing, but putting what is heard into practice. The direct command of God emphasizes being obedient to the Word of Christ over everything else. It highlights obedience more than any other of our senses or experiences. They weren't to trust in the supernatural experience on the mountain, but even more so in the Word of God through Christ.*

Applications

- *Some people seem to get so caught up in End Times prophecy that they seem to be attempting to by-pass the cross and go directly to the end. What is the problem with such a notion? How do Christ and the apostles confirm in their own warnings concerning the End Times that the most important thing for Believers is to continue preaching the Gospel?*
- *There were no statues, paintings, or photographs of Elijah or Moses, yet*

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the apostles recognized them. It should be comforting to know that when the signs of the End Times are revealed, the Spirit will plainly reveal their meaning to Believers.

- The work of the cross always comes before everything connected with the End Times because no one can experience the Second Coming without accepting the work of His First Coming.
- Others?

[Read v.14-29]

¹⁴When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. ¹⁵Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and began running up to greet Him. ¹⁶And He asked them, “What are you discussing with them?”

¹⁷And one of the crowd answered Him, “Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; ¹⁸and 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.”

¹⁹And 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!”

²⁰They 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. ²¹And He asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?”

And he said, “From childhood. ²²It 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!”

²³And Jesus said to him, “‘If You can?’ All things are possible to him who believes.”

²⁴Immediately the boy’s father cried out and said, “I do believe; help my unbelief.”

²⁵When 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.”

²⁶After 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”

²⁷But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up.

²⁸When He came into the house, His

Q: Let’s make a list. Who are all the different groups or people waiting at the bottom of the mountain?

1. The father who brought his son to be healed.
2. The demon-possessed boy needing to be healed.
3. The disciples who failed to heal the boy.
4. The scribes who were spiritual antagonists of the situation.
5. The large crowd observing all that was going on.

Q: What do all these have in common with the boy?

A: The boy’s being physically “deaf and mute” (v.25) was a parallel to everyone’s being spiritually “deaf and mute”.

Q: How does Jesus’ revelation, “This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer” (v.29) connect together with His initial statement, “O unbelieving generation”?

A: Apparently while Jesus and the three were away, the remaining disciples were not living a life of prayer and faith. They were living differently when Jesus was away than when present with them.

Point: *Spiritual failure usually involves unbelief resulting from a lack of prayer and discipline more than anything else. Those who won’t be prepared for His return are those who aren’t living the way they should during the physical absence between His First and Second Comings.*

Q: What is being taught by the fact that the devil made one, final attempt to destroy the boy? (v.26)

A: Often just prior to deliverance, the devil seems to get a great victory, but Christ always wins the battle.

Point: *This is the fourth time in Mark that Jesus has addressed the issue of His followers’ lack of faith.*

And He said to them, “Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith?”

Mark 4:40

for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, “Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid.” Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.

Mark 6:50-52

And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember,

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disciples began questioning Him privately, “Why could we not drive it out?”

²⁹And He said to them, “This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer.”

when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?” They said to Him, “Twelve.” “When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?” And they said to Him, “Seven.” And He was saying to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

Mark 8:17-21

Faith – walking and living according to Christ’s ways regardless of the circumstances – is the actual proof that we’ve been healed from being spiritually blind, deaf, and mute.

Applications

- *The private signs on the mountain for the three were the same as for all those witnessing Christ’s healing of the boy – don’t just be hearers, but doers of the Word, putting into practice Christ’s Word regardless of appearances or circumstances.*
- *Christ grants power and authority to us, but that does not mean we no longer need to spiritually prepare ourselves. What He has given us can be rendered ineffective simply by becoming disobedient to His Word and shunning our prayer life.*
- *Others?*

³⁰From there they went out and began to go through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know about it. ³¹For 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.” ³²But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him.

[Read v.30-32]

Q: How might this teaching actually fit quite well with all that went on just before this with the healing of the demon-possessed boy?

A: Their problem had been living differently when Jesus had been away for just a few days than when He was with them. This is a teaching that He will not always be physically present and that they will be having to undertake a life of faith without Him.

Q: Of what aspect of Christ’s love does this speak?

A: Christ’s love for sinners.

³³They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, “What were you discussing on the way?”

³⁴But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest.

³⁵Sitting 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.”

³⁶Taking 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.”

[Read v.33-37]

Observation: *In the original Aramaic language in which Jesus spoke, it may be helpful to point out that the word “child” and “servant” are actually the same word.*

Q: What does this reveal about the disciples in spite of what they should have learned from the experience and teaching of both the transfiguration and the healing of the boy?

A: They have not yet learned that the cross must come first. They’re still wanting to jump directly to Christ’s Second Coming to enjoy the benefits of His coming kingdom rather than experience the necessity of the work required to produce that kingdom.

Q: What is the basic nature and role of a child in Jesus’ day?

A: A child was provided guardians and tutors to bring them up so as to inherit their father’s business upon achieving adulthood. It symbolizes being tutored under the Old Testament Law and Prophets until their fulfillment in Christ.

Q: What is the basic nature and role of a servant in Jesus’ day?

A: A servant had nothing of their own – everything was supplied by their master. They did nothing except at the command of their master’s voice,

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exclusively carrying out the master's business. It symbolizes that having achieved adulthood in the Word of Christ, we are to be His servants, exclusively devoted to His Word and ways.

Q: Of what aspect of Christ's love does this speak?

A: Love for one another.

[Read v.38-41]

³⁸John 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."

³⁹But 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. ⁴⁰For he who is not against us is for us. ⁴¹For 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.

Q: What is particularly ironic about the person John wanted to rebuke?

A: Whereas the so-called "official" disciples of Christ could not cast out the demon in the boy, here an "unofficial" disciple accomplishes what they could not!

Q: What is the real problem with John's assertion?

A: John says, "He was not following us" instead of "not following Christ".

Q: How does Jesus confirm that this is the problem with John's assertion?

A: By stating that such persons are "followers of Christ".

Q: Of what aspect of Christ's love does this speak?

A: Loving those outside our immediate fellowship.

[Read v.42-50]

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.]

⁴⁵"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, ⁴⁸where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.

⁴⁹"For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰Salt 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."

Observation: It's important to note the use of the term "to stumble" because Jesus isn't talking exclusively about sin by itself, but about something which someone does to another person to trip them up. He's speaking of enabling sin.

Q: Given the context of Jesus' teaching to this point, what is the most likely culprit to cause someone "to stumble"?

A: Someone who clings to their own self-interest rather than becoming a servant to others. Someone not engaging in Christ's work of love.

Q: What do the dramatic actions of cutting off an offending hand or foot or plucking out an eye represent?

A: When it comes to sin, especially sin which becomes ingrained as a natural part of our personality and behavior, we must deal drastically with it, not casually.

Q: How would the disciples picture "hell" as described here by Jesus?

A: The Greek word "Gehenna" comes from the Hebrew "ge Hinnom", meaning the valley of Hinnom. It was the place just outside of Jerusalem where all the garbage was deposited and burned. This place literally burned and smoldered day and night, the waste being devoured by fire and eaten by worms.

Point: Hell is a real place where souls will experience continual suffering.

Q: What does it mean to "be salted with fire"?

A: It refers to suffering persecution for Christ's sake to be conformed to Him in a life of co-death and co-resurrection.

Q: And what does it mean, "Have salt in yourselves"?

A: It refers to maintaining true Christian character and integrity. (See Mt. 5:13)

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Q: How does this fit in with not causing others “to stumble”?

A: It’s maintaining our faithfulness and witness under every circumstance and situation. It’s actually an extension of the teaching regarding the disciples’ inability to heal the boy because they did not live the same way when Jesus was away as when He was present. We’re supposed to live consistently as a servant of His love to others.

Q: Of what aspect of Christ’s love does this speak?

A: Loving the lost.

Overall Application

Yes, it would be much easier and nicer for us if we could be instantly transported to heaven and live with Jesus in His kingdom, but that’s not how it works. Before the Second Coming, there is the work of the First Coming; before the work of the Millennial Reign we must first engage the work of the cross. The apostles were given a glimpse of the future, but had to understand that the working of Christ’s love must be completed first, the biblical definition of Christ’s love:

- Christ’s love for sinners
- Love for one another
- Love for those outside our immediate fellowship
- Love for the lost

Just as the apostles’ eyes had to be opened to the proper sequence of events defining the overall work of Christ’s ministry, so we need to clearly understand that, in reality, the work of His Second Coming is unfolded in carrying out the work of His First Coming. How well do you recognize that preaching the Gospel and serving others in love is actually the fulfillment – or failure to fulfill – the work of the Second Coming?

Epilogue

*If you **REALLY** want to understand the full context of this chapter and the greater meaning behind these things, consider Christ’s teaching just prior to this in Mark 8:34-9:1. In reality, this whole passage is a series of real-life events expressing this greater message behind them:*

And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 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.” 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.”