

Bible Study Guide: Week of 2-8-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Mark 9:2-9

²Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” ⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

²Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.

The reference to “six days later” refers back to Jesus’ first passion prediction in Mark 8:27—9:1. In this passage, Peter correctly identified Jesus as the Messiah, but was scandalized that Jesus insisted that his being the Messiah meant suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection. Jesus then told the disciples and the crowds that any who wanted to follow him needed to take up their crosses and follow him. The events of our gospel reading to day takes place 6 days later—on the heels of the disciples’ wrestling with what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah. Here, Peter, James, and John are invited into an episode which will further instruct them in what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah, although as we will see they do not fare much better here in understanding what Jesus means. The mountaintop setting calls to mind the Exodus stories about Mount Sinai, among other Old Testament motifs.

The word for transfigured here is “*metemorphothe*”—an obvious cognate for our English word “metamorphosis.” Jesus is transformed before the eyes of these three disciples. The description of his garments is quite evocative and is meant to suggest a level of brightness and glory that is beyond human perception. Literally, the description is that “his clothes became exceedingly shining white such as no launderer on earth is able to whiten them.” This is a heavenly glory, beyond normal earthly existence. Like the mountaintop setting, this calls to mind the way Moses’ face shined after being in God’s presence.

⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

And, speaking of Moses, here he is, joined by Elijah. The two of them, of course, are representative of “the Law and the Prophets.” Both were also important figures in the history of Israel who, legend has it, never actually died, but were raised up to heaven. In Elijah’s case this is narrated for us in the sequence with the flaming chariot at the end of Elijah’s ministry (see 2 Kings 2). According to Deuteronomy 34:6, Moses was buried after his death in a valley in the land of Moab, but the exact location was unknown. Possibly because his burial site was unknown, later Jewish tradition held that Moses was also assumed into heaven. The presence of these two legendary figures with Jesus lends a sense of both mystery and divinity to his ministry.

⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

Simon Peter, understandably terrified along with the others, offers a strange suggestion to build “dwellings.” This could be a reference to the “dwellings” or “booths” or “tabernacles” used during the Feast of Tabernacles. It could also have been a reference to the “tent of meeting” and the other Israelite tents mentioned in Exodus 33:7-11. This makes more sense in context, as Peter is clearly aware that

they are experiencing something holy and otherworldly. This “tent of meeting” was the place where Moses met with God to discuss “face-to-face” various issues facing the Israelites during the Exodus. The idea, then, would be to replicate Moses’ access to God and, by extension, the peoples’ access to God. In any case, it seems clear in v. 6 that Peter’s suggestion was truly the result of confusion. He is terrified and at a loss for rational words.

⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” ⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

The presence of the cloud also calls to mind the Exodus narratives in which God appeared in a cloud to Moses and the people. The voice from the cloud calls to mind the voice from heaven in Mark 1:11 at the Baptism of Jesus. There, (according to Mark) the voice said to Jesus, “You are my son, the beloved; with you I am well-pleased.” Here, the voice speaks not to Jesus directly, but to the disciples (and/or possibly to Moses and Elijah): “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

This verse continues the motif we have talked about before often referred to as the “Messianic Secret.” Jesus is reluctant in Mark’s Gospel to allow his disciples or others share any news about him. Of course, the more sternly he warns them, the more eagerly they go and tell. This continues until the final scene at the tomb when the first witnesses of the resurrection are commanded to “go and tell” that Jesus has been raised from the dead and they go and tell no one because they are afraid. This sets up in the readers’ mind a sense that someone has to go and tell this amazing news about Jesus, thus compelling the reader to become a witness.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. How do you think Peter, James, and John recognized who Moses and Elijah were?**
- 2. What do you think Jesus might have been discussing with Elijah and Moses?**
- 3. Why do you think Jesus ordered the disciples not to tell about what they had seen until after the Resurrection?**