

THE GOSPEL OF MARK - PRESENTATION 9

THE GRADUAL REVELATION OF JESUS

I. After the feeding of the 4000 and the following discourse, the next section describes a gradual unfolding of who Jesus is, which includes three revelations (Peter's confession, the Transfiguration, and Bartimaeus' confession of Jesus as the son of David), three miracles, and three predictions of the passion, combined with the continual misunderstanding of the apostles.

II. Cure of the Blind Man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26)

A. Jesus and His disciples at last arrive at Bethsaida, their destination from long ago (6:45). Bethsaida is further north in the Chosen People's primordial land, at this point the capital of the tetrarchy of Philip and the birthplace of Peter, Andrew, and Philip. See John 1:44, 12:21

B. Mark alone describes this first cure of the blind man. It serves as the beginning of this section on gradual revelation, which ends with the cure of the blind Bartimaeus.

C. The blind man's gradual cure reflects the gradual revelation of Jesus to the disciples. It also reflects the natural healing process from blindness.

D. In this case, as with previous miracles, the intercession of others is needed, but also Jesus treats the blind man away from the crowds, in an individual fashion.

E. Jesus tells him not to return to the town, possibly to keep the miracle secret, and possibly to preserve the man and the message from the skepticism of Bethsaida. See Matt. 11:20-24, Luke 10:13-15.

III. Peter's Confession.

A. Now the scene shifts to the furthest north place in the Chosen People's ancestral land. Caesarea Phillipi was a town named by Philip for the emperor and himself. Mount Hermon, a snow capped mountain rose over it.

B. Jesus first asks what the crowd thinks. Their answers reflect Herod's view. See 6:14.

- The belief that He is John the Baptist would be remarkable, give that dead prophets were not known to rise again.
- The belief that He was Elijah would indicate the accurate belief that the day of the Lord had come, see Mal 3:1, 22-24; Sir. 48:10, but not that Jesus Himself was the Messiah.
- The belief that He was one of the prophets was based upon the desire for prophesy to return again.

C. Peter's response indicates that these expectations were not great enough.

- For the most part, people believed that the coming Christ, the anointed, would be a king who would fulfill the glorious promises of a future king to restore Israel's glory. See Ps. 2, 110. Is 9:1-6, 11:1-16; Jer 22:4, 23:5-6; Ezek. 34:23. However, the Essenes also believed that there would be a priest Messiah, based in part on Psalm 110 and Zechariah 4:1-3.

D. Most of the predictions that specifically mention an anointed, however, also describe his sufferings. See Ps. 89:39-52; Dan. 9:24-26; Hab. 3:13. In addition, there is a notion of a time of trial before the reign of the Messiah would begin.

E. Peter is clearly in the leadership position, as even his stumbles would indicate.

F. All the Synoptics record this account, but Mark describes it less than the others, perhaps to focus on the secretness of Jesus's identity.

III. The First Passion Prediction and Discourse on Discipleship (Mark 8:31-9:1)

A. The first passion prediction describes the Son of Man as suffering like any other human, but even more so. The resulting discourse combines this notion with a notion of glory, reflecting the Son of Man prophesy in Daniel 7.

B. Peter, having shown leadership in belief, now leads the way in misunderstanding. The rebuke is harsh, but softened by the clear implication that the whole crowd also had to be instructed.

- Paradoxically, Peter is tempting Jesus is the opposite way as Satan in Job. It is more like the temptations described in Matt. 4:1-11.

C. Jesus' point about carrying a cross is dramatic. Crucifixion was a horrible way to die, often lasting a week.

D. Jesus says one must have a willingness to lose life, not necessarily a desire for it.

- There was a debate among Jews about the resurrection and afterlife generally. See Ecc. 3:17. However, there are predictions of rewards for those who persevere, especially for those who suffer. See Wis. 3:1-8; 2 Macc. 7:31ff; Isaiah 57:1.

- Matthew describes the account in very similar words, but Mark also records Jesus as describing suffering "for the sake of the gospel." It is ironic that good news leads to such persecution.

E. Jesus offers final glory, but not on easy terms. No merely sentimental religious feeling will do.

F. Jesus' comment about some now living seeing the kingdom of God most likely refers to the rapid spread of the Church after Jesus' ascension. But it could also refer to the Transfiguration, or even special sight into the mysteries of the kingdom.

IV. The Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8)

A. The transfiguration may have been on Mount Hermon far in the north, or on Mount Tabor in the south of Galilee.

- All the Synoptics describe this event. Typical for Mark, he uses the earthy comparison to a fuller, or launderer to describe Jesus's appearance.

B. As with the raising of Jarius' daughter, Jesus brings just Peter, James, and John. It may have been an attempt to keep the event secret for the time, but also to have enough witnesses to verify it. See, e.g., Deut 17:6; 19:15.

C. This event is connected both to the baptism of Jesus, in which the glory of God also came down and identified Jesus as the beloved Son of God, and with the confession of Peter, which was also followed by a misunderstanding of the apostles, a

reference to Satan and a discourse on discipleship.

- According to Aquinas, the revelation at the baptism reveals the new dignity of the baptized in future ages, while the transfiguration reflects the glory of the faithful in heaven.

D. Moses and Elijah both represent the law and the prophet, but they are also the two leading figures of the Hebrew Scriptures whose bodies were never recovered. See Deut 34:6; 2 Kings 2:9-12.

E. Matthew and Mark specifically record that the Transfiguration occurred six days after the last discourse. The timing may reflect an idea of a recreation, for the original creation was in six days.

- There was a Jewish belief that, before the Fall, Adam and Eve were clothed with the light of glory. The Transfiguration reflects a restoration and increase of that glory.

F. Peter wants to stay and build a tent, as the Israelites had for the ark in the desert, for he wanted the presence of God to be there continually. The cloud and the answer he receives indicates that Jesus is the presence of God and that, by listening to Him, he can have God's presence continually. But he must return to serve others.

G. On the descent, Jesus once again refers to His death and resurrection. Again, the apostles misunderstand Him, possibly thinking that He would be taken up to heaven and return like Elijah. Jesus indicates that the spirit of Elijah did come to John the Baptist and he also suffered for God.