

WHEN A GOOD PLACE IS THE WRONG PLACE

Mark 9:1-13

Introduction:

We have just recently come through the Easter season. It is a critically important time on the church calendar. The cross, and Jesus death on that cross, and then his resurrection from the dead, are at the very heart of the Christian message.

This morning we are returning to the gospel account of Mark, after a few weeks for other areas of focus. We are picking up our study in chapter 9, and the events recorded here occur just a few weeks before Jesus was put on the cross to die a horrible death for you and me.

Mark 9:1-13 – we just read these verses. But I would like to back up a bit, in order to set these verses in their context. Through the first 8 chapters of the book of Mark we have seen Jesus as the Servant, the Son of Man who came to serve, yet He shows himself as the powerful miracle worker. He healed the sick, he gave sight to the blind, made the lame to walk. He fed thousands of people with a small lunch, walked on water, calmed a storm instantly. Ray Stedman suggests that in the first half of this book Jesus could be called “The servant who rules.” He came as a servant, yet he is revealed as the one who rules over nature, over disease, over all the things that we have no power to control.

But then, toward the end of the 8th chapter, we come to a turning point. Jesus, being aware of his soon-coming arrest and subsequent death, takes his disciples up to the northern regions of Israel, to Caesarea Philippi. There, in the heart of one of the most idolatrous places, in the shadow of a despicable pagan temple, a place actually known as the “Gates of Hades (hell),” he asks them some critical questions and reveals some truth about what is coming.

Review briefly Mark 8:27-38:

- Questions regarding his identity
- The truth about his coming death and resurrection
- Demands of discipleship

He ends this teaching moment with an interesting statement in 9:1 – *read it*. Luke just says, “...until they see the kingdom of God.” Matthew says, “...until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” What did Jesus mean by that? And what did the disciples take it to mean?

Jesus’ disciples were certainly aware of the prophetic Scriptures regarding a Messiah who would come and rule on the throne of David. For them, the idea that Jesus could be that Messiah was an amazing thought, because they believed that meant that kingdom was going to appear at any moment. It might be a matter of months or weeks or even days until Jesus would establish His kingdom.

Of course, we know that they did not have the full picture. Jesus did not establish his kingdom at that time. So, what did Jesus mean? Let me simply say that what Jesus was referring to was a preview of the glory that would appear in the kingdom. That is precisely what Peter, James and John saw as we move into our text this morning. Let’s go there ...

The Transfiguration vv. 2-8

After six days ... Luke says, “About eight days after...” But let’s just say that approximately a week later Jesus took his inner circle of disciples—Peter, James, and John—with him up to the top of a high mountain. I believe it was probably Mount Hermon, the highest peak in Israel, just a short ways northeast of Caesarea Philippi.

- He was transfigured – changed, transformed – *describe...*
- Even his clothes became more radiant than anything earthly could possibly be.
- Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus

What was it they were talking about? Neither Mark nor Matthew tell us the content of that conversation, but Luke does. In Luke 9: 30-31 we read, “*And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*”

They were talking about his coming death, his departure. They were discussing what was to happen when he arrived in Jerusalem—his purpose in coming to earth. They were talking about the very things that

Jesus had been explaining to his disciples just days earlier – see 8:31. The content of their discussion was the whole redemption plan of God, which Jesus had come to accomplish, and would soon be accomplished through his death in Jerusalem.

It is not clear whether the disciples could hear this conversation, but even if they did, with their selective hearing, they could not seem to hear or accept the idea of Jesus dying. After all, a Messiah would not die, right? He came to rule not to be put to death.

Never one to hold his tongue, it seems Peter just had to say something. So, in the midst of this discussion, he comes up with a brilliant idea. At least it seemed like a great idea to him. *Read vv. 5-6.*

Being overcome with terror, and not knowing what else to say, Peter blurts out, “It is good to be here.” This is a good place. Let’s stay here. We’ll build some shelters and just enjoy the glory here on the mountain.

But at that moment something else happened. A dark cloud cast its shadow over them and a voice spoke out of the cloud. It was the voice of God. *Read v. 7* – Matthew adds the words, “...in whom I am well pleased.” The same words the Father spoke at Jesus’ baptism. God announced his love for the Son and his pleasure in him, at the beginning of his public life (baptism) and now again at the end of his public life.

But there is something far more significant here. Note the command, “*Listen to him.*” For a long time I thought this was just a general command to Peter to be quiet and quit talking so much. But I now believe it is much more than that. When you realize the content of that discussion on the mountain and you think about what Jesus had been trying to tell his disciples, you can see what God, the Father was saying.

Listen to what He is trying to tell you. Just days earlier, he had told them that he would be rejected and put to death in Jerusalem. Peter’s response was, “No Lord, that will never happen.” In the intervening days, he may very well have talked about it some more. Then there would still more occasions. See Mark 9:30-32 – they didn’t understand and were afraid to ask; 10:32-33 – immediately afterward, James and John are asking about a special position in the kingdom.

They just didn’t get it. As John MacArthur says, “They had glory on the brain.” All they could think about was the glory of the coming kingdom. And what they were experiencing up there on the mountain only added to that. No wonder Peter said, “It’s good to be here.” This is a good place. Let’s just stay here. We can establish a kingdom and enjoy the glory right here.

But God was saying, “No, you need to pay attention. You’re not listening. This is my Son, listen to him.” And when He had said that, suddenly, in an instant, the other men were gone. The disciples looked around and there was no one with them except Jesus. And, although it is not stated, the implication is that Jesus has now returned to his original state, changed back to his normal human appearance.

Conclusion

Well, we really need to wrap this up and see the lessons in this for us. I want to go back to the statement of Peter on the mount of Transfiguration – “Teacher, it is good that we are here.” This is a good place, let’s just stay here. Mountaintop experiences are wonderful. Those times when we have a special encounter with the risen Lord – through his word, through fellowship with the family of God; special times of worship and teaching, when the Lord really reveals himself to us in a fresh way. And when we have those experiences it is easy to wish that we could just stay there and enjoy it. But the truth is that life cannot be lived on the mountaintop. It may be there that we are refreshed and renewed and challenged and encouraged. But life must be lived out in the valley.

When Jesus and the three disciples came down from the mountain, they were immediately met by a problem that needed fixing, a man with a demon-possessed son who needed relief. Yes, the mountaintop was a good place. But they could not stay on the mountain, there was work to be done down in the valley.

Prayer