

“Lord, we believe; help thou our unbelief!”

Pastor Sam Richards

24 March 2024—Palm Sunday

Texts: Acts 3:12-26; Mark 9:1-30

13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His [a]servant Jesus, *the one* whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. 14 But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 but put to death the [b]Prince of life, *the one* whom God raised from the dead, a *fact* to which we are witnesses. 16 And on the basis of faith in His name, *it is* [c]the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which *comes* through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.

17 “And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. 18 But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His [d]Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled¹.

This excerpt from Peter’s second apostolic message reveals mastery over the material Jesus imparted to his disciples in the forty days between his resurrection and his ascension. And that is not all, Mark 8-9 describes a week long seminar that Peter went through following his confession, **Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.** This was in response to the question Jesus asked, **Who do men say that I am?** The answers were various and, initially, superficial. The question of Jesus’ messianic identity had provoked the Pharisees who came requesting a sign². Christ is explained to the disciples 1. as the one who came to suffer and atone for sin, 2. as the one who after three days would rise again (past, present and future implications) vindicated, 3. As bringing the Kingdom of God with power: realized eschatology (as in end times life now; in fulfilled prophecy) and 4. the preeminence of prayer. Redeemer, Resurrected Lord and King of kings.

Mark 9:1 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.

I want to walk us through this week-long seminar which is bookended by two healings of deaf and mute persons—**both brought to him by others.** In Mark 9:7 a

¹ Footnotes

- a. Acts 3:13 Or *Son*
- b. Acts 3:15 Or *Author*
- c. Acts 3:16 Lit *His name*
- d. Acts 3:18 Or *Anointed One*; i.e. Messiah

² This is the occasion when Jesus had rebuked their idle curiosity declaring that no sign would be given this evil and adulterous generation except the sign of Jonah—and the setting of that sign was Nineveh where the prophet preached repentance: **Yet forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed.** The Ninevites worshipped the “fish god” so that it is ironic that a great “fish” transported him to their shores! Anyway the message was “Repent and avoid the wrath to come.”

voice from heaven declares, **This is my Beloved Son, (you) give heed, or listen to Him.** *Now this is precisely what a deaf person cannot do!* Furthermore, the impaired person also cannot tell others what he has heard, or learned—this is one reason for the narrative to unfold in this way. The people are astonished. At the other end, we have a son who is possessed of an unclean, mute and deaf spirit who is brought to Jesus for deliverance. There is no astonishment reported at the second healing—spiritual interference going on! That condition reveals in our own day as well!

Mark is careful to inform us that Jesus is returning from the region of Tyre and Sidon towards Capernaum and Galilee. Chapter 8 begins with the second miraculous feeding-(Jesus is Jehovah-Jireh?!) The Pharisee's request and Jesus points out that he is Jehovah Jireh

31 And He began to teach them that the Son of Man 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. *None of this made sense to Peter-at least, not yet!*

Peter argued with Jesus! Showing that being carnal and worldly, or deaf and mute!, he wasn't listening to Jesus and he certainly wasn't getting it. Still the instruction is on-going. This is why Peter speaks about building tabernacles for Jesus, the Law and the prophets—as if they planned to stick around for a season!

(The Transfiguration as demonstration/object lesson.)

2 Six days later, Jesus *took with Him Peter and [a]James and John, and *brought them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; 3 and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. 4 Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. 5 Peter *said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three [b]tabernacles, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” 6 For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified. So we ask, What matters to God?! 7 Then a cloud [c]formed, overshadowing them (a symbol of divine presence!), and a voice [d]came out of the cloud, “This is My beloved Son (This is who God says Jesus is!), [e]listen (this Greek word means pay attention, heed) to Him!” 8 All at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone.

This event transpires, most likely, on Mt. Hermon; at 9,000 plus feet, it is high. What is not obvious on first reading that this demonstration, **of rising**, is proof of the resurrection with Moses and Elijah, from widely spaced time periods, making an alive appearance—they are meeting, conferring, and convening in person and as embodied entities who, apparently, are recognizable for who they are!. This is what I mean by an object lesson. Not only that but as we declared in our opening scripture: **The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus. And they are witnesses to that,** on Mt. Hermon. **Yes, all three of the apostles whom Jesus had taken with him.** That is important because it means they were not hysterical, fantasizing or hallucinating—it is an attested to fact! Alive together and raised together!

9 As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, [f]until the Son of Man rose from

the dead. (We are reminded that this is a prophetic word—something to be accomplished on the kingdom timetable.) **10 They [g]seized upon [h]that statement** (the Greek implies that they held this to themselves!) **discussing with one another [i]what rising from the dead meant.**

11 They asked Him, saying, “Why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” 12 And He said to them, “Elijah does first come and restore all things. (And what would the chief thing be that John the Baptist restored? It would be prophecy. God would speak again. There would be a turning of the hearts of men to God through repentance.) **And yet how is it written of the Son of Man that He will suffer many things and be treated with contempt?** (These were topics visited by Jesus, Moses and Elijah in their mountain top conference.) **13 But I say to you that Elijah has [i]indeed come, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him.”** (They imprisoned and beheaded him.)

All things are possible to him that believeth because nothing is impossible with God.

14 When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. 15 Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and began running up to greet Him. 16 And He asked them, “What are you discussing with them?” 17 And one of the crowd answered Him, “Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; (and deaf, unhearing.) 18 and [k]whenever it seizes him, it [l]slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and [m]stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it.” 19 And 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!”

20 They brought [n]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. 21 And He asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. 22 It 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!”

23 And Jesus said to him, ““ If You can?’ All things are possible to him who believes.” (The doctrine on the primacy of faith—without faith, prayer is impotent, ineffectual!) **24 Immediately the boy’s father cried out and said, “I do believe; help my unbelief.”**

25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was [o]rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You deaf and mute spirit, I [p]command you, come out of him and do not enter him [q]again.” (Now I remind you that this is the book end to the weeklong seminar Jesus held explaining what it means to be the Christ. It means suffering an atoning death as a sacrifice for sin that men might be recovered to God, or restored to a right relationship with God. It means death and resurrection—humiliation and vindication and glorification (which is what Paul claimed occurred through the resurrection). It means defeating Satan,

defying the grave and triumphing over death—death is not the end, it is not final, there is life in a glorious hereafter.)

26 After 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!” 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up. (The most difficult interpretation of this is as follows: the boy who looked **like a corpse** did so because he was a corpse. He died in the deliverance—this is not typically the case, or necessarily the case but, in this case: he died and Jesus raised him from the dead. A parallel instance is that of Paul, having **been stoned and dragged out of Lystra and was supposed to be dead** (Acts 14:19), actually died authenticating his claim to have been **more in deaths/resurrections** than the other twelve apostles. (2 Cor. 11:23.) Now whither does one go in the face of such a deliverance, such blessing as this boy experienced? Now that he is “free” and “alive,” now that he has become a testimony to the power and goodness of God?! The Gerasene demoniac was sent to evangelize his family and friends just like Mary Magdalene and the woman at the well—the latter “converted” her whole Samaritan village! There is a song in their hearts (“O love that will not let me go?”) *They are not ignorant of the works of God; they speak of wonders of His way being no longer mute and deaf!*

28 When He came into *the house*, His disciples *began* questioning Him privately, “Why could we not drive it out?” (The referent of this “we” must be the nine other disciples who were not on Mt. Hermon with Jesus!) **29 And He said to them, “This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer.”** (This is the doctrine on the supremacy of prayer.) **30 From there they went out and *began* to go through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know *about it*.** **31 For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, “The Son of Man is to be [r]delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later.”**

So now you know what the disciples had been told about the meaning of being Christ: a willing sacrifice, atoning for our sins (and none of his) as part of the great redemption pageant of our salvation. You know that it has to do with resurrection, **rising from the dead** which resurrections they had witnessed beforehand, repeatedly—without comprehension, I suppose. Are we now able to connect the dots? Post-resurrection can we now explain the things leading up to the triumphal entry?!

What? Are we so mute and deaf—that we tell no one? We have witnessed the power encounter between Christ and the prince of this world so that we can relate in real life terms the doings of heaven, the details of the divine plan? We must not obsess over current events, troubles, threats, wars and turmoil. (“Nobody knows the troubles I see”) Brothers and sisters, let us look up, think up, live up—let us concern ourselves with eternity and eternity’s God and we shall better live out these days.

32 But they [s]did not understand *this* statement, and they were afraid to ask Him³.

Let that not be said of us! Happy Palm Sunday.

Amen.

³

Footnotes

- a. Mark 9:2 Or *Jacob*
- b. Mark 9:5 Or *sacred tents*
- c. Mark 9:7 Or *occurred*
- d. Mark 9:7 Or *occurred*
- e. Mark 9:7 Or *give constant heed*
- f. Mark 9:9 Lit *except when*
- g. Mark 9:10 Or *kept to themselves*
- h. Mark 9:10 Lit *the statement*
- i. Mark 9:10 Lit *what was the rising from the dead*
- j. Mark 9:13 Lit *also*
- k. Mark 9:18 Or *wherever*
- l. Mark 9:18 Or *tears him*
- m. Mark 9:18 Or *withers away*
- n. Mark 9:20 Lit *him*
- o. Mark 9:25 Or *running together*
- p. Mark 9:25 Or *I Myself command*
- q. Mark 9:25 Or *from now on*
- r. Mark 9:31 Or *betrayed*
- s. Mark 9:32 Lit *were not knowing*