

MARK 9-12 NOTES

Similar to the commencement of his ministry at his baptism when God's voice is heard to acknowledge Jesus' sonship and establish his authority to speak for God, the same happens to Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration (9: 2-13). The words "Listen to him" are both a challenge and a demand on the disciples. Will they listen, respond in faith, and follow?

1) What is the direction Jesus is going to which a person is called to follow?

It is the direction of suffering and death (denying oneself & taking up one's cross), but with the promise of resurrection to those who can trust it. Jesus foretells his fate again (9:30-32, 10:32-34), his example is that of a servant giving his life for others, (10:35-45) and a humble king who is aligned with the marginalized and outcast (11:1-11). Those who will lose their life of comfortable compromise with the world are promised their reward (10: 28-31).

2) What is it that a person needs in order to follow?

A person needs faith. Faith can move mountains so to speak (11:20-24), but also requires prayer (9:29,11:24). Faith wrestles with doubt and unbelief (9: 14-29). Faith is the source of healing (9:14-29, 10: 46-52). It requires child-like openness (9:36-37, 10:13-16), humility (David as example -12:36-37), self-denial (9:42-50), a willingness to forgive (11:25), to love others as much as God and oneself (12:28-34), and to risk giving generously (12: 41-44).

3) What kinds of people resist Jesus and his call to follow?

A) Those who have too much to risk losing in terms of comfort, status, or riches for the sake of a kingdom ordered differently than this world as it is. (10: 17-27)

B) Those who have different expectations and hopes of the messiah, namely, the disciples. They are looking to gain earthly rewards of status and greatness (9: 33-37, 10: 35-45)

C) Those whose status of authority religiously and politically is directly threatened by Jesus. The tension and conflict between Jesus and various groups of religious officials increases, especially as he heads to Jerusalem and enters the temple. (10: 1-12, 11: 15-19, 27-33, 12: 1-31)

Jesus challenges the scribal interpretation of the law, accusing Scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees of prioritizing the convenience and power of some at the expense of others. Women, for instance, were totally dependent on men for their well-being, and thus, whether it was divorce or the loss of a husband in some other way, they would be left in very precarious situations. Jesus' strictness around divorce and his teaching about how life will be in the kingdom of heaven, is intended to undercut the unjust and unequal power between men and women in the structure of society then, also reflected in the religious interpretation of the law (10: 1-12, 12: 18-27). Of course, reading Jesus' words as literally applicable in our very different context today would also lead to the kind of legalistic oppressiveness Jesus was seeking to combat then (i.e. divorce as prohibited on any grounds).

Jesus also shows up their hunger to secure their hold on power rather than accept the truth, wherever it may point to (e.g. from John the Baptist or Jesus himself 11:27-33). They continually try to entrap Jesus and make him look bad among people, but Jesus only proves himself superior to them in argumentation and in his authority (12:13-40). Jesus denounces them as being more concerned about money and honour rather than the welfare of people (12:38-40). He condemns their whole religious system (11:15-19) and offers a parable of their condemnation and doom (12:1-12).

Of particular note is how the question of authority is turned against them. They question Jesus as to his authority. What Jesus ends up doing is establishing his superior authority to theirs. The difference is that Jesus is unafraid to speak truthfully, his only concern being the authentic revelation of God's will and the good of the people. The religious authorities, on the other hand, are totally concerned with their hold on power as well as the mood and opinion of the public toward them. For this reason, they speak in obscure ways and refrain from expressing any opinion that may endanger their standing among the people. The stage is set for the final confrontations between Jesus and them.