

DAY 7: DISCIPLESHIP AS THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Mark 8:27–9:29

PIERCING THE VEIL (MARK 8:27–9:1) Mark’s Gospel reaches a climax in chapter 8 with Peter’s declaration that Jesus is the Messiah. Until now Jesus has directed His teaching to the masses; from this point forward He focuses on His disciples. The passage begins as Jesus and the disciples head north to Caesarea Philippi, on the border of Syria. On the way, Jesus probes their minds: “*Who do people say that I am?*” (8:27). The disciples repeat the latest rumors.

Jesus now asks, “*But who do you say that I am?*” (8:29). The disciples have heard Him teach, seen Him heal, and observed His interaction with authorities. They have traveled and eaten with Him. Yet until this moment, they have not been challenged to make a decision about Him. Peter’s answer does not come from external promptings, but from God Himself: “*You are the Christ.*” Peter certainly does not fully understand the meaning or the importance of his confession. Nevertheless, he has stated truth. The confession is out; the commitment is made. Jesus must now begin to teach the disciples what it means.

THINK ABOUT how many of us, like Peter, confess to believe in Jesus as the Christ, yet have little understanding of the implications. It takes time to comprehend who Christ really is and what He requires of us. But we have to start somewhere. If we wait to be sure we understand it all and feel capable of doing everything required of us, we’ll never get on the way at all. The One to whom we give our allegiance will Himself sustain, guide, and enable us to do what is required. He is committed to us!

Jesus “*began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected ... and be killed, and after three days rise again*” (8:31). This talk confounds His followers: Never had the Jews even considered that the Messiah would suffer. Peter recoils at the thought of a suffering Messiah and rebukes the idea. But in trying to spare Jesus suffering, Peter unknowingly opposes God. He does not realize that Jesus’ suffering is the only way to defeat Satan. Peter’s reproof of Jesus opposes the essential design of the Incarnation. Accordingly, Jesus rebukes Peter with the words “*Get behind Me, Satan*” (Mark 8:33).

To follow Jesus one must “*take up his cross and follow Me*” (8:34). Mark adds four statements on the meaning of discipleship:

- “*Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life ... will save it.*” Disciples do not have a both/and choice—both Christ’s life and their own life. Christ’s claim is exclusive and total.
- The second statement poses the question: supposing one gained everything (“*the whole world*”)—possessions, renown, security, peace—at the cost of eternal life? Would it be worth that price?
- Another question implies that having “*the world*” is a poor bargain. When one loses his life itself and the essence of his being (“*his soul*”), how can he buy it back?
- Jesus warns that anyone who is ashamed of Him in this “*adulterous and sinful generation*” will find the Savior of mankind ashamed of him when Jesus returns to the earth in glory at the Second Coming.

The section closes with a puzzling statement: “*There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power*” (9:1). This may refer to the glorious Second Coming of the King or to Jesus’ Resurrection. Some scholars view the Transfiguration as prefiguring the Resurrection. The resurrected Christ can surely be said to be “*the kingdom of God ... come with power.*”



THE TRANSFIGURATION (MARK 9:2-13) “*Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them, and His clothes became radiant, intensely white*” (Mark 9:2-3). For a moment in time, the luminous presence of God breaks through to show His glory to sinful humanity. Moses and Elijah appear, “*talking with Jesus.*” Bewildered at the sight, Peter suggests building tents. Whether he is thinking

of the tents at the Feast of Tabernacles or something else, he clearly wants to commemorate the moment. The Transfiguration reaches its climax in the heavenly voice: *“This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him”* (9:7). *“Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only”* (9:8). Moses and Elijah vanish; only Jesus remains.

Jesus *“charged [the disciples] to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead”* (9:9). Puzzled, they begin to discuss *“what this rising from the dead might mean”* (9:10). If, as Jesus said, the Son of Man would be raised, then He first must die. Unprepared to face such thoughts, the disciples divert the topic of conversation to Elijah. Judaic tradition held that Elijah would return to herald the Messiah and call God’s people to repentance. Jesus assures them, *“Elijah does come first to restore all things”* (9:12). Then He adds something that must have shocked them, for apart from the vaguest of references, there was no hint that Elijah would suffer before the Messiah’s coming. *“Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased.”* The disciples get a glimmer of insight: John the Baptist had come in the spirit of Elijah.

THE PLAIN AND THE TYRANNY OF EVIL (MARK 9:14-29) At the foot of the mountain, Jesus and the three disciples discover the teachers of the Law cross-examining their comrades. Mark tells of a malevolent force at work on a boy, which *“has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him”* (9:22).

As the child convulses, his father reaches out in tremulous faith: *“If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us”* (9:22). *“If you can!”* replies Jesus. The problem is not divine inability but human disbelief. *“All things are possible for one who believes”* (9:23). The father responds with candid humility: *“I believe; help my unbelief!”* True faith is aware of its own frailty. True faith has no confidence in itself, but opens itself to God.

Seeing the crowd increase and not wishing to make a display of His power, Jesus quickly heals the boy. The evil spirit leaves the boy for dead, *“but Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose”* (9:27). This miracle, in one sense, foreshadows His own death, which would be a victory for the forces of evil until His triumphant Resurrection.

PERSONALIZE this lesson. Two words in this week’s text hold the key to rising out of defeat. The first, God spoke on the Mount of Transfiguration: *“This is My beloved Son; listen to Him”* (9:7). Listening means keeping our minds focused on Him—on His Word and on His character. The second is found in Jesus’ reply to the disciple’s question, *“Why could we not cast [the evil spirit] out?”* He replies, *“This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer”* (9:28-29). Prayer, then, is the second key to climbing out of the depths of defeat. Where there is prayer, there will be power. What is one of the fiercest battles you are fighting right now? Reflect on how listening to Jesus could turn the tide in this struggle. Then, bring the battle before God in prayer. Commit to praying daily about this struggle for the next week. A week from now, record below the impact listening and prayer have had on your struggle.

REVIEW: DISCIPLESHIP AS THE WAY OF THE CROSS

13. Review the Scriptures given below and share any insights you have gained about one of the following:
 - a. comprehending who Jesus is (8:29)

 - b. hearing the voice of God in your life (9:7)

 - c. experiencing the power of prayer (9:29)