LESSON *seven*

A TASTE OF GLORY

Mark 9:1–50

Getting Started

Do you think it was easier to be a disciple in the first century than it is to be a disciple in the twenty-first century? Explain.

Setting the Stage

The Transfiguration of Jesus is recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and referenced by John and Peter. Arguably, it is the most important event to occur in Jesus' life between His birth and His death. The Transfiguration involved seven characters: two of the most important men of the Old

Testament, three of the most prominent disciples of the New Testament, God the Father in heaven, and God the Son on the earth.

When we examine the events of the Transfiguration, we see that it reveals several important things about Christ. First, the Transfiguration serves as *a presentation of His glory*. According to Mark 9:3, the translucent light that came from Jesus' inner being was so bright it caused His clothing to become white. It was a picture of the Jesus who would come out of the tomb three days after His death. It was an image of the Jesus who would come in the clouds in great glory to set up His kingdom on this earth. It was a picture of the future triumphant Christ.

Second, the Transfiguration provides *proof of Christ's deity*. God in heaven speaks to Peter, James, and John from a cloud and says, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Mark 9:7). In effect, God was saying, "I don't want you to have any doubt about what is going on here. This One who just revealed Himself to you is My beloved Son. Listen to Him."

Third, the Transfiguration is *a preview of Christ's suffering*. Mark 9:4 reveals that Elijah and Moses were talking with Jesus. In Luke's Gospel, we learn the topic of their conversation: Jesus' impending death in Jerusalem. "And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:30–31).

Finally, the Transfiguration is *a picture of Christ's exclusivity*. Moses and Elijah vanished, and only Jesus remained. This was to dispel the notion there was any kind of equality among the three men. Jesus alone remained because He alone is salvation.

Exploring the Text

The Transfiguration (Mark 9:2–13)

[2] Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. [3] His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like

snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. [4] And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. [5] Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"— [6] because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid.

[7] And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" [8] Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves.

[9] Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead. [10] So they kept this word to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant.

[11] And they asked Him, saying, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

[12] Then He answered and told them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and restores all things. And how is it written concerning the Son of Man, that He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? [13] But I say to you that Elijah has also come, and they did to him whatever they wished, as it is written of him."

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1. Mark likely heard the story of the Transfiguration from Peter himself. As Peter recounted the story, how do you think he felt about his words and actions that day?

2. The Jewish teachers of the law believed that Elijah would come before the arrival of the Messiah and lead the people to repentance (see Malachi 4:5–6). How did Jesus respond to this claim? What did He indicate had already taken place (see Mark 9:11–13)?

Jesus Heals a Boy Possessed by an Impure Spirit (Mark 9:14–29)

14 And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude
around them, and scribes disputing with them. 15 Immediately, when
they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running
to Him, greeted Him. 16 And He asked the scribes, "What are you
discussing with them?"

17 Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought
You my son, who has a mute spirit. 18 And wherever it seizes him, it
throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and
becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it
out, but they could not."

19 He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long
shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me."
20 Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately
the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed,
foaming at the mouth.

21 So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening
to him?"

And he said, "From childhood. 22 And often he has thrown him
both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can
do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

[23] Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."

[24] Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

[25] When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!" [26] Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, "He is dead." [27] But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

[28] And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?"

[29] So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."

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3. How do you interpret the father's words, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief" (verse 24)?

4. Why do you think prayer and fasting are essential for some actions of faith? Why didn't the disciples think to pray when they were trying to drive out the demon?

Jesus Predicts His Death a Second Time (Mark 9:30–37)

30 Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and
He did not want anyone to know it. 31 For He taught His disciples
and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands
of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the
third day." 32 But they did not understand this saying, and were
afraid to ask Him.

33 Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house
He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on
the road?" 34 But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed
among themselves who would be the greatest. 35 And He sat down,
called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first,
he shall be last of all and servant of all." 36 Then He took a little child
and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in
His arms, He said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one of these little
children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives
not Me but Him who sent Me."

5. Jesus didn't want anyone to know He was passing through Galilee because He wanted uninterrupted time with His disciples. What was the important message He wanted them to understand (see verses 30–31)?

6. Why do you think the disciples were afraid to ask Jesus about His prediction of His death (see verse 32)?

Whoever Is Not Against Us Is for Us (Mark 9:38–50)

38 Now John answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we saw someone who
does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade
him because he does not follow us."

39 But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a
miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. 40 For he
who is not against us is on our side. 41 For whoever gives you a cup of
water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly,
I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.

42 "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me
to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around
his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you
to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather
than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be
quenched— 44 where

'Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.'

45 "And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for
you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into
hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— 46 where

'Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.'

47 "And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire— 48 where

'Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.'

49 "For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. 50 Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another."

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7. Not only did the disciples argue about which of them was the greatest, but they also tried to stop someone who was not part of their group from doing Christ's work (see verses 34, 38). How would you explain their attitude?

8. Based on the events of Mark 9:14–41, what might cause another believer (especially "one of these little ones") to stumble in his or her faith?

Reviewing the Story

At the Transfiguration, Jesus gave Peter, James, and John a glimpse of His glory. Coming down from this literal mountaintop experience, Jesus had to settle a dispute involving His other disciples, who had failed in their attempt to drive out a demon. Yet their failure seemed to have little effect on their egos. As they made their way to Capernaum, the disciples got into an argument about which of them was the greatest. They also tried to place themselves above another follower of Christ who was driving out demons using a method different from theirs.

9. Read 2 Peter 1:16–21. How did Peter's brief glimpse of Jesus' glory in the Transfiguration forever change his life (see Mark 9:2–6)?

10. Why did Jesus lament about the "faithless generation" that surrounded Him? How was He having to "bear" with them (see Mark 9:14–19)?

11. Why do you think Jesus had such concern for the "little ones" who believed in Him (see Mark 9:36–37)?

12. What are some actions Jesus' followers should (and shouldn't) do to "have peace with one another" (Mark 9:50)?

Applying the Message

13. In Mark 9:24, the father of the child with an unclean spirit said to Jesus, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" How can you make that father's prayer your prayer? In what areas do you need to confess your lack of faith? Take a moment to ask Jesus to increase your faith.

14. What specific things can you do to help prevent others from stumbling spiritually?

Reflecting on the Meaning

In Mark 9, we read that when Jesus, Peter, James, and John came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, they met with the other nine disciples, who had gotten into an argument with a man who had brought his demon-possessed son for healing. Initially, the man got nothing for his efforts because the disciples could not exorcise the demon. Jesus later explained they had failed because "this kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting" (verse 29).

Yet in verse 38, those very same disciples felt justified in criticizing a man who was casting out demons using a different method. Truth be told, they were probably upset because he was doing a better job of it than they were. Many of us today share the struggles of those first disciples. We find a style of evangelism we prefer and convince ourselves it is the only effective way for bringing people to Christ. However, were we to travel to different parts of the world, we would discover that God uses all kinds of people and means to bring people to Himself. We do great damage when we think we're the only ones who know how to do it right.

It is a sad fact that pride and competitiveness often lead us to work against others who are on the same team. The result is that those who are living in darkness get ignored while we argue about the "right" way to reach them. Instead, we must remind ourselves we serve the *same* God and are working toward the *same* goal. The things that separate us are insignificant.

If we are going to make an impact on this world for Jesus Christ, we can't allow pettiness and jealousy to distract us. We're all on the same team. So when one of us wins, we all win.

Journaling Your Response

What might cause you to criticize another believer's faith or way of serving God? How can you stop yourself from being overly critical of that person?