

THE QUESTION THE DISCIPLES DID NOT ANSWER

Mark 9:30-37

Intro: Matthew, Mark, and Luke follow each other closely at this point in their Gospels. We find Matthew's account of this in Matthew 8:1-5, and Luke's account in Luke 9:46-48. As is usual there are distinctions between them, but, basically, the accounts are the same, although Matthew and Luke's accounts are much shorter than what Mark has recorded.

This is Matthew's account:

- 1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?
- 2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,
- 3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.
- 4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
- 5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me (Matt. 18:1-5).

This is Luke's account:

- 46 Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest.
- 47 And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by him,
- 48 And said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great (Luke 9:46-48).

You will find as you read and compare the three synoptic Gospels, that they often mention the same truths or events, but not in the same order, and sometimes not even in the same chapter. And by the way, when I speak of Mark's Gospel, and Matthew's Gospel, and Luke's Gospel, or John's Gospel, I am not saying that there are four different Gospels, that is, four different messages. There is, of course, only one Gospel. But when I attach the writer's name to one of the Gospels, I am just saying that that is what it is, that writer's record of the life and ministry of the

Lord Jesus. So the Gospel of Mark is the book of the Bible that was written by John Mark, not a different message from the other three. The message of all four writers is the same message.

Today, as we come to verse 30 of chapter 9 in Mark's Gospel, we leave behind both a tragic incident and a glorious blessing. The tragic incident had to do with the failure of the disciples to deliver a demon-possessed boy from the demon who was making life miserable not only for the boy, but also for his parents, especially his father who had brought his young son to the disciples. But it was a glorious blessing because what the disciples had failed to do, the Lord Jesus Christ did. And when the disciples asked the Lord, "Why could not we cast him out?" (Mark 9:28), the Lord said that such a work could only be accomplished "by prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:29).

He wanted His disciples to know that, regardless of the spiritual gifts they might have, the power to exercise those gifts could only be received as they expressed their dependence upon God in prayer. It is important that we know the truth, the truth of God's Word. But even that can only be received as we are constantly expressing our dependence upon God in prayer. The apostles showed that they had learned that lesson well when, as the work of the Lord grew so rapidly in the opening chapter of the book of Acts, they refused to let anything pull them away from "prayer, and the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:4). They gave themselves to prayer. This was the secret of the ministry of the Apostle Paul. His epistles indicate that, although he traveled far and wide in the Roman Empire preaching the Gospel and building up the saints, he was a man who was continually praying. As I sought to bring out last week, the apostles had allowed themselves to become so occupied with the work of the Lord, that they were not taking time with the Lord Himself. It is very easy for that to happen. It has probably happened to all of us. It may be one of our problems right now. If so, we need to do something about it before this day comes to an end.

I. THE LORD'S TEACHING ABOUT HIS DEATH AND HIS RESURRECTION (Mark 9:30-32).

Well, the Lord and the disciples had been in Caesarea Philippi ministering in the towns in that area, and it was in that area where the three apostles, Peter, James, and John, were with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration. But our text, beginning with verse 30 of chapter 9 in Mark, says that

the Lord and His disciples left where they were, in Caesarea Philippi, and went down through Galilee, on their way back to Capernaum (see verse 33). On the way the Lord taught His disciples again that He was going to be delivered into the hands of men, that they would kill Him, and that after three days He would rise again. Remember that He had spoken to His disciples once before just after Peter's great confession of Christ. (See 8:31.)

Bishop Ryle had this to say about verse 31:

The immense importance of our Lord's death and resurrection comes out strong in this fresh announcement which he makes. It is not for nothing that He reminds us again that He must die. He would have us to know that His death was the great end for which He came into the world. He would remind us that by that death the great problem was to be solved, how God could be just and yet justify sinners. He did not come upon earth merely to teach, and preach, and work miracles. He came to make satisfaction for sin, by His own blood and suffering on the Cross. Let us never forget this. The incarnation, and example, and words of Christ are all of deep importance. But the grand object which demands our notice in the history of His Earthly ministry is His death on Calvary (pp. 185-186).

The Lord didn't want to make this known to anyone else. There is no telling what people might have done, particularly those who were friendly toward Him, if they had known what was going to happen. Besides, He wanted to tell His disciples again what He had told them before. It often takes all of us going over a truth many times before it finally gets into our understanding. And their own ideas of what the Lord came to do, had blinded them to the possibility that any other reason should have been the purpose for our Lord's coming into the world.

Notice that the Lord did not set any time when this would take place. He did not say where it would take place. He did not say how He would die. Nor did He say why He would die. But Ezra Gould in the ICC says that the present tense of "is delivered" was meant to show the certainty of this future event. He did not say to whom He would be delivered. (This would involve Judas. It would involve the Lord Himself. And it would involve even the Father Who would deliver His Son into the hands of His enemies.) Nor did He say to whom He would be delivered. He just spoke of the fact that it would happen. He would die, but then He would rise

again on the third day.

And then Mark tells us that the disciples did not understand what He was talking about, and that they “were afraid to ask Him.” *Why?* we must ask. Certainly not because the Lord was unapproachable, or because they felt that He would rebuke them. It probably because it was teaching that they did not want to accept. It ran contrary to what they expected the Messiah to do. These are some of the suggestions that Matthew Henry has given us. Luke tells us that “it was hid from them” (Luke 10:45). The Lord’s words were not difficult to understand, but He reveals truth to us a little at a time. And that is what the Lord was doing here.

Now we come in verse 33 to a very sad situation, which led to further teaching from the Lord.

II. THE DISPUTE THAT THE DISCIPLES HAD WITH EACH OTHER (Mark 9:33-37).

The word translated “disputed” in verse 33 is not the same word that is translated “disputed” in verse 34, but it is hard to distinguish between them. They both mean practically the same thing. A kind of a debate was going on among the apostles. They probably had tried to keep it from the Lord as they walked along toward Capernaum, but when they got there He asked them, “What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?” But the debate probably turned into a full fledged argument as to who was the greatest among them. And you can be sure that each disciple was pushing his own case, and producing arguments as to why he was the greatest. And they were still thinking in terms of the Lord establishing His kingdom on the earth. Some expositors have said that they thought that it was when Judas finally realized that the Lord was going to die, that He turned against the Lord. He may have felt that since he was the one who kept the money for the apostles, that he might be someone like our Secretary of the Treasury when the Lord established His kingdom. He was a thief, the Bible tells us, and that would have given him a greater opportunity to become a bigger thief (because he understood nothing about the new birth and salvation).

You will notice that none of the apostles answered the Lord’s question. The Lord, of course, knew the answer, but He wanted them to explain what they were doing. Each one was presenting his own case. It would have been interesting to hear how each man presented his own case.

I don't know what most of them would have said, but I can imagine that Peter, James, and John had a very strong case. And Andrew would have been close behind them. After all, weren't they the first to be chosen by the Lord. And hadn't the three of them just been with the Lord in the mount where they had seen the Lord in His glory, along with Moses and Elijah. I wonder, don't you, if there were any of them who did not take part in this dispute. The Lord mentioned no names. Actually we learn in the very next chapter of Mark that James and John requested of the Lord that they might sit on each side of the Lord when He came into His kingdom. See Mark 10:35-45. In Matthew's account (20:20-29) we are told that it was James and John's mother who made the request. So all three, James and John and their mother were involved in it.

Now what does all of this amount to? Just one thing: PRIDE!

Quoting Bishop Ryle again, he says:

It is an awful fact, whether we like to allow it or not, *that pride is one of the commonest sins which beset human nature* (italics mine). We are all born Pharisees. We all naturally think far better of ourselves than we ought. We all naturally fancy that we deserve something better than we have.—It is an old sin. It began in the garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve thought they had not got everything that their merits deserved.—It is a subtle sin. It rules and reigns in many a heart without being detected, and can even wear the garb of humility.—It is a most soul-ruining sin. It prevents repentance, keeps men back from Christ, checks brotherly love, and nips in the bud spiritual anxiety.—Let us watch against it, and be on our guard. Of all garments, none is so graceful, none wears so well, and none is so rare, as true humility (pp. 186-187).

What did the apostles say in response to the Lord's question. "They" all "held their peace." That means that none of them said anything, not even Peter! They knew in their hearts that what they had been doing, and what they had been saying, was all wrong. They all knew it. What an awful moment that must have been. No one said a thing. But how did the Lord respond?

Verse 35 tells us that "He sat down, and called the twelve [so all of them needed what He was going to say], and saith unto them . . ." Do you remember that the Apostle Paul told Timothy in his second epistle to him,

“All Scripture is given by inspiration from God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof . . . (2 Tim. 3:16a). They need to know that the way of God are much different from the ways of men. In fact, the ways of God are usually just the opposite of the ways of men. So let us remember that the Lord only spoke the truth. There is never any reason why a true believer would ever want to dispute the words of the Lord Jesus. What did the Lord say? Listen to His words: “If any man desire to be first, the same shall be the last of all, and servant of all” (Mark 9:35).

This was teaching that none of the apostles, or disciples, understood. He told them that if you want to be the greatest, it does not depend on who you are, or the position that you hold, but it depends upon how you serve God by serving others.

And then to illustrate what He was talking about, He took a little child, held him in His arms, and said what we read in verse 37. (Read.)

I came across a definition of what it means to receive a child in the Lord’s Name, or what it means for us when we pray, to pray in the Lord’s Name as He said we were to do in verses like John 14:13:

13 And whatsoever ye shall ask in My Name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

Dr. Gould says that “the phrase indicates that a person is so connected with another, that he receives whatever consideration belongs to that other (p. 174).

So to receive a little child in the Lord’s Name, means that that little child will receive from you and me the same loving treatment that the Lord would give to him or her, as the case may be.

In the light of all of this, it is surprising that we read in the very next chapter of Mark, Mark 10, verses 13-16, how the disciples treated parents (I suppose they were) who brought their children to the Lord.

You can usually see the character of a person by the way he treats a little child, and to treat a child like the Lord Jesus did, is one of the greatest evidence of humility. And so to come to the Lord, looking for everything, but not feeling worthy of anything, as a child would come to an adult, is the kind of an attitude that the Lord looks for when we come to Him for salvation. A child’s hope is not in what he can do for an adult, but in what that adult can do for him.

Concl: Our Lord is the greatest Example of humility that there has ever been. The Apostle Paul made the clear in the opening verses of Philippians, chapter 2, where we read, beginning with verse 3:

3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:3-8).

The Bible has much to say about humility. To be humble is to be like the Lord Jesus. And that is why God has saved us – to make us like His Son, not that we are all going to *look* like Him, but we are all going to *be* like Him.

The Lord did not use many words in our text for today, but there are probably no more important words for us to learn as we seek to please the Lord in our lives day by day. Humility must be in the heart before it can really be performed in our lives. If it is only outward, it is hypocrisy. Man may look at the outward appearance, and he does, but the Lord looks on the heart.

Closing verse: Psalm 115:1 – “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth’s sake.”