

**The Transfiguration**  
**Mark 8:22-9:13**  
**Jenny Douglas**

The end of chapter eight transitions from Jesus' ministry in Galilee to his journey towards Jerusalem and the passion narrative. In Mark's gospel, there are three major confession scenes in which Jesus' identity is clearly revealed: first, in his baptism; second, in the transfiguration; third, in the crucifixion and resurrection. Over the past few weeks, we have discussed the disciples' confusion and misunderstandings about Jesus' identity and role. In today's passage, Jesus becomes more explicit about what he has come to accomplish and what will be expected of his followers.

Mark 8.22-26: the healing of a blind man

1. This miracle story is unlike any other in the gospels because the healing of the man comes in two stages. Look at the positioning of this story in relation to the feeding of the four thousand and Peter's confession in the upcoming verses. What could this healing represent on a more symbolic level?

- Isaiah's prophecy refers to the healing of blindness as a kind of salvation oracle. Look at Isaiah 35: how does the coming of the Messiah bring sight?

Mark 8.27-30: Peter's confession

2. Finally, the moment we've all been waiting for—the disciples' comprehension! Peter answers the central question of the gospel: who is Jesus? What does "Christ" mean, and what expectations accompany Peter's identification of Jesus as the Christ?

Mark 8.31-33: Peter messes up

3. Jesus responds to Peter's confession by talking more explicitly about what He, as the Son of Man, must do in order to fulfill his purpose. In contrast to his teaching in parables, here he speaks plainly to the disciples. What does Peter's immediate rebuke of Jesus reveal about his understanding of Jesus' role? What can we learn from seeing Peter's rapid switch from right to wrong response [from Hewitt]? Why does Jesus rebuke Peter by calling him "Satan"?

4. The name "Son of Man" occurs 81 times in the gospels, mostly spoken by Jesus himself. Why does Jesus choose to self-identify as Son of Man rather than the Son of God? For OT reference, look at Daniel 7.13-14 and Ezekiel.

- The apocryphal Book of Enoch also refers to the Son of Man coming to wreak vengeance on the earth.

Mark 8.34-9.1: Discipleship

5. Jesus' description of the Christian life is written as a series of paradoxes that revolve around self-denial. John Calvin, in his *Institutes*, defines self-denial in the following passage:

We are not our own;  
therefore neither our reason nor our will should predominate in our  
deliberations and actions.  
We are not our own;

therefore let us not propose it as our end, to seek what may be expedient for us according to the flesh.

We are not our own;

therefore let us, as far as possible, forget ourselves and all things that are ours.

On the contrary, we are God's;

to him, therefore, let us live and die.

We are God's;

therefore let his wisdom and will preside in all our actions.

We are God's;

towards him, therefore, as our only legitimate end, let every part of our lives be directed. (qtd. in Williamson 156)

What are your responses to Calvin's definition? Do any of these points present particular difficulty to you? Williamson writes that in answering the question "Who is Jesus?" we begin to answer the question "Who am I?" Do you agree, and why?

#### 6. Mark 9.2-13: the Transfiguration

- Scholars now believe that the Transfiguration occurred on Mt. Hermon, in the present day Golan Heights. Since the mountain is 9,400 feet high, it may be reasonable to think that this scene happened on the lower slopes.
- What is the significance of the transfiguration for our understanding of the person of Jesus? [question from Hewitt]
- Why is the timing of this scene significant in Jesus' ministry and in the construction of the gospel?
- Why do you think Moses and Elijah are the biblical figures present? In verses 11-14, who does Elijah represent?
- For the first time, Jesus tells the disciples to keep this experience secret *until after the resurrection*. Why is this final caveat so important?
- Williamson notes that the verb "transfigured" (vs. 2) resonates with the Hellenistic mysteries of gods and people becoming intertwined, while the verb "appeared" (vs. 4) is associated more with biblical theophanies and visions. How is Jesus' identity as the son of God similar to his Hellenistic counterparts, and how does this passage set him apart as different?
- For an interesting OT parallel to the father/son relationship, look at Abraham's mission to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis 22.

#### 7. Extra Credit: Discuss the following quote, by Clement of Alexandria, in relation to 8.36:

Those who neglect good works may fail to grasp just how much the good work of God has benefited them. Hence they are less capable of praying fittingly so as to receive good things from God. And even if they receive them, they will likely be unaware of what has been given them. And even if they enjoy them, they will not enjoy worthily what they have not understood. For from their lack of knowledge they will not grasp how to use the good things given them. And from their impulsiveness they will remain ignorant of how to avail themselves of the divine gifts offered.