

## Monday Evening Bible Reading Notes: January 20<sup>th</sup>: Mark 9: 2-29: Some Notes

The Transfiguration (Probably Mount Hermon rather than Mount Tabor); a brief discussion of the end days; the disciples have been doing their own thing, rather unsuccessfully in this case; the roles of faith in healing and of prayer in healing. The Cross is very much on the horizon.

The background bits = the bits the Disciples and the first listeners/readers might have got more readily than we get them. Peter, James and John do tend to stand out among the named disciples – though we get a rather false perspective on their importance because we maybe mix up James the brother of John and James the brother of Jesus; and we maybe tend to take John the brother of James as the same John who wrote the Gospel of John, the Epistles of John, and the Revelation of John (which is probably not right). Since Andrew brought his brother Peter to Jesus, I do find myself wondering just a little whether Andrew ever thought a little about it being nice if Jesus had chosen two sets of brothers for special treatment.

As regards the geography, it isn't certain that Mark recorded the geography carefully. However, Mount Hermon is up north, where the previous sections of Mark have been set; it is about five times as high as Mount Tabor far down south; and it has a bare snowy top, while Tabor had a fort at the top. As regards Moses and Elijah: traditionally, Moses was the great Law-giver and Elijah the greatest of the prophets; both "disappeared" rather than being dead and buried in a known location; both were closely connected with Messianic prophecies. There were highly specific stories of Elijah as herald of the New Order. The bright shining bit was all about Jesus joining the other two in the heavenly realms – not about all three being Divine. (Bright lights come into both the Moses and the Elijah stories.)

There is an important bridging point here. We tend to see the heavenly world (the spirit world) as completely different from and separate from the mundane "real" world. The Jews of the time and e.g. the Celtic Christians did not see things that way. Still less did they see any notion of a heavenly world as "OK if you want to believe in that sort of thing". For them, and hopefully for us, heaven is what we experience if we dig deep enough. Note how Jesus gives His companions the glimpse of the glory, the ultimate reality, speaks of death and resurrection, and then grasps hold of the hesitant faith of a father and the desperate need of a severely ill son, and brings the healing the disciples couldn't bring.

Why did the mountain experience, that both Mark and Luke say took place about a week after the previous events, happen? Maybe the Father confirming the decisions of the Son; and maybe Father and Son giving the disciples just a glimpse of underlying reality as the took on board the hard immediate reality that their job/ their journey was going to get a great deal harder not a great deal easier.

Why couldn't the disciples cure the boy? (Mark talks demon possession, not epilepsy; but to us it looks like epilepsy at its worst.) Maybe because they were relying a bit too much on their own newly discovered abilities. Hard to imagine that they were not praying.

Why did Jesus get uptight? More likely, he was irritated by the disciples, rather than the distraught parent. The father's statement of faith/doubt will stand for ever as a testimony to our ambivalence. (Remember this guy had relied on the disciples to do a Jesus job, and that they seem to have relied on being able to do that job.) Reflection: Maybe folk expect us to do a Jesus job... and maybe they are sometimes disappointed.

Further Reflection: Don't ever expect being a Christian to get easier! Think the person who has got the potted plant on the window sill just about "right", and there is a tap on the shoulder and someone points them towards the untended garden. Think the person who has just left the Albert Hall with Handel's "Messiah" ringing in their ears, and is confronted by a suppliant who might or might not have contributed to their own misfortune but is clearly cold and hungry. Think.....