

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – Mark

SB_MK3_Chapters 9-16

The last half of the book of Mark begins with chapter 9 and the transfiguration of Jesus on a mountain. Many of Jesus' discourses that we studied in the parallel portions of Matthew's Gospel are not recorded by Mark. The following chart provides a list for the parallel passages in Matthew that correspond to the last half of Mark.

Discourse in Matthew	Psg in Matthew	Parallel Psg in Mark If Present At All
The Parable of the Lost Sheep	18:10-14	None
Dealing with a Sinning Brother	18:15-20	None
The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant	18:21-35	None
The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard	20:1-16	None
Parable of the Two Sons	21:28-32	None
Parable of the Wedding Feast	22:1-14	None
Jesus Laments over Jerusalem	23:37-39	None
The Faithful Servant & the Evil Servant	24:45-51	None
The Parable of the Wise & Foolish Virgins	25:1-13	None
The Parable of the Talents	25:14-30	None
The Son of Man will Judge the Nations	25:31-46	None

The chart reflects the pattern that is characteristic of Mark's focus upon the acts of service of the Servant Son of God rather than the content of His teaching. As we did last week, we will focus upon only a few sections within Mark where I believe that a review will be helpful even if we may have covered that section in detail previously. In so doing, I will try to point out differences and illustrations of Mark's emphasis and themes. Obviously, I will not be able to do justice to the last half of the book in this study; however, you should be able to construct a good interpretation of any of the passages using the notes from Matthew's parallel passage.

The Transfiguration (9:1-13)

There are some slight differences between Mark's account of this incident and that of Matthew's account. For instance, Matthew does not record the disciples asking questions among themselves regarding the meaning of rising from the dead; however Mark does (9:10). But on the whole the two accounts are very much the same.

After speaking of His coming kingdom (8:38), Jesus stated that some disciples standing there with Him would be permitted to view His coming kingdom before they experienced death (9:1). As we have noted, this statement has caused many to misunderstand the kingdom program since they wonder how the disciples saw the Lord coming in His kingdom. The transfiguration in the verses to follow provides the explanation.

Verse 2 picks up six days later (eight in Luke's account in Luke 9:28 which probably includes the beginning and ending days as well as the six days in between). The high mountain was probably one of the spurs of Mount Hermon (9,400 feet) – perhaps Mt. Miron (3,926 feet)

which lies between Caesarea Philippi (north of the Sea of Galilee and east of the Jordan River) and Capernaum on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee (see Matt 17:24). At any rate, evidently it took Jesus and His disciples about six days to travel from Caesarea Philippi to this mountain.

Only Peter, James, and John went with Jesus up to the high mountain. On this mountain, Jesus was transfigured. The Greek word for “transfigured” is from the verb μεταμορφοω and means *metamorphosis* or *to change in form*. These disciples were witnesses to a manifestation of Jesus’ preincarnate glory (John 1:14; 17:5; Phil 2:6-7) and His post-resurrection exaltation (2 Pe 1:16-18).

Moses and Elijah appeared also and they were speaking with Jesus. As we have noted in our study of Matthew, there are a number of observations and explanations associated with Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus at the transfiguration. For instance:

- No one witnessed the death of Moses and Elijah was immediately translated from earth to heaven (Deut 1:37-38; 3:23-28; 34:1-8; 2 Ki 2:11-14)
- Both Moses and Elijah had eschatological prophecies connected with their ministries.
 - Moses was a type of the Prophet to come, i.e. Jesus (Deut 18:15-18)
 - Elijah was prophesied to be a forerunner of the Messiah (Mal 4:5-6)
 - John the Baptist would have fulfilled this role in Jesus’ 1st Advent had Israel accepted Him as the Messiah (Matt 11:14; Mk 9:13)
 - However, even if that had occurred, there would have still been a 2nd Advent preceded by a seven year Tribulation during which an Elijah figure would be needed to fulfill the prophecy of Malachi
 - Both experienced a vision of God’s glory
 - Moses at Sinai (Exod 31:18)
 - Elijah at Horeb (1 Ki 19:8-18)
- Moses represented the Law and Elijah represented the Prophets, therefore together on the Mount of Transfiguration, they symbolized the Law and the Prophets which Jesus fulfilled (Matt 5:17)
- Moses, Elijah, and the disciples represent all the people who will be present in the coming Kingdom, i.e. the disciples represent those present in physical bodies, Moses represents saved individuals who have died or will die, and Elijah represents those who will not experience death, but will be caught up into heaven alive (1 Thess 4:17).
- Finally, two witnesses of the Messiah will prophesy during the Tribulation for a three and one-half year period. These two witnesses have long been identified as resuscitated Moses and Elijah due to the linkage between the miracles that they perform and those performed by Moses and Elijah of antiquity (Re 11:3-14)
 - They can prevent rain (Re 11:6) like Elijah whose prayer caused it not to rain for three and one-half years (1 Ki 17:1, 7 cf. Lu 4:25; James 5:17).
 - They can turn water into blood (Re 11:6) like Moses did with the plagues upon Egypt (Ex 7:17-21)

In verse 5, Peter expresses a desire to build three tabernacles – one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. Peter’s suggestion is not as ridiculous as some have suggested. The idea of a tabernacle was associated with the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles when Jews built shelters for themselves and lived in them for seven days (Lev 23:42-43). The Feast of Tabernacles (Booths) was designed to be prophetic of Israel’s millennial rest whereby the kingdom of heaven is tabernacled (dwelling) among men on earth. What Peter desired, the dwelling of heavenly and earthly people on earth, was not possible at that time, but will be possible during the Messianic kingdom portrayed by Christ in the transfiguration.

The bright cloud of verse 7 is associated with the departure from Egypt via Moses (Ex 13:21-22; 16:10; 19:16; 24:25-28; 40:34-38) and with the shekinah glory of God in the Holy of Holies (e.g. the glory of the Lord departing from the Temple in Ezek 10:3-5, 18-19; 11:22-23).

The voice from heaven had a significant effect upon Peter. He referred to it in his epistle years later (2 Pe 1:16-17). Also, these are the identical words that were spoken at Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist in Mark 1.

In verse 9, Jesus knew that the crowds wanted a type of Messiah different from that portrayed in Jesus' public ministry. Jesus knew that the event would only stir up superficial and fleshly empowered attempts to enthrone Jesus. Furthermore, if Jesus' closest disciples found it hard to understand a suffering and dying Messiah, the crowds would have even more difficulty. After all, the message of John the Baptist had already been rejected.

Jesus' Disciples – Unable to Heal? (9:14-29)

Mark's account of this incident contains the most detail regarding the miracle itself. This is certainly consistent with Mark's focus and pattern as we have previously noted. However, Matthew's account includes some detail that Mark's does not. For instance, Matthew notes that the father of the boy "knelt" before Jesus (Matt 17:14). In addition, Matthew includes more information regarding Jesus' instruction of His disciples (see Matt 17:20-21) and we examined the meaning of these verses in our study of Matthew. This distinction between Mark's lack of focus upon Jesus' discourses when compared to Matthew in these verses is just one example among many.

When Jesus, Peter, James and John returned from the Mount of Transfiguration, a crowd had evidently gathered around the other nine apostles. A man with a demon possessed son had sought healing help from the nine. They had not been able to cast out the demon. Jesus had clearly given the disciples (apostles to Israel) the power to heal and cast out demons (Matt 10:1, 8; Mk 6:7-13). The power to cast out demons and perform other miracles was given to them (Matt 10:8) so that their message of the kingdom gospel to Israel (Matt 10:6-7) might be confirmed. The failure of the disciples to exercise this authority and perform kingdom miracles was related to their own walk of faith. Jesus reinforces this principle in Matthew 10:20. Some other points regarding this incident that we also covered in our study of Matthew and that are worthy of review include:

- Jesus' comments were directed to His disciples (not the Church Age believer) and must be understood in view of His commissioning of them as recorded in Matthew 10:1-15 and Mark 6:7-13. Context is crucial to properly interpreting this and any passage of Scripture.
- One of Matthew's themes – the contrast between the glory of the Transfiguration and Jesus' disciples' unbelief is part of the mounting tension that magnifies Jesus' uniqueness as he moves closer to his passion and resurrection. Mark had a similar theme as you may recall from our first lesson on Mark. The difference is that Mark was focused upon the cost of being a disciple of Jesus and as such, one would be misunderstood and there would be failures among those whom he leads.
- In Mark 9:23-24, the father says "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." This statement of the father is not contained in Matthew's account. Matthew focused upon the failure of the disciples whereas Mark was focused upon how Jesus was misunderstood by both disciples and others. To Mark, this was a part of the cost of being a spiritual leader.
- The disciples did have some faith for they had expected to be able to exorcise the demon, but they were unsuccessful. However, they were treating the authority that had been given to them like a gift of magic. In contrast to their understanding, Jesus tells them that a life bathed in prayer (even fasting to give time for more prayer) was needed (see verse 29).
- The blindness experienced by the disciples is similar to the blindness that characterizes the world (the cosmos) from which the disciples who were apostles to Israel (Matt 10) had to escape. As we studied in Matthew, these disciples had not given proper attention to their spiritual lives (i.e. there was neglect of the truth presented to them and a neglect of prayer), therefore they had no power to push through the spiritual adversity, i.e. a demon possessed boy.

Question for personal application: In your own personal ministry to others, can you say with Paul that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you? Or do you find yourself discouraged by adversity, distracted by self-centered thinking, and without focus in your spiritual life? God has given each CA believer a spiritual gift and places the *yielded* believer in a ministry with that gift. Have you learned to tap into the spiritual power that is available to you as a Church Age believer? (See 1 Co 1:4-9; 2 Co 1:3-7; Eph 1:3-23; Phil 1:3-11; Col 1:9-14; cf. 1 Co 9:3-14; 2 Co 10:4-5; 11:22-28; 1 Tim 1:18-20; and Phil 1:27-29 as examples of Paul's prayers for CA believers and his personal example of enduring in the midst of adversity because of a spiritual vision). Paul is an excellent example of one who knew the cost of discipleship – the very principle that Mark illustrates in his Gospel narrative.

Jesus is Questioned About Others Who Cast Out Demons (9:38-41)

Matthew does not include the observation and question raised by Jesus' disciples. However, both Mark and Luke do. Matthew does include the general discourse of Jesus within the context of His instruction to His disciples who He has just commissioned as apostles to Israel (Matt 10:1-15). The point that Jesus is trying to make in Mark 9:39-41 is that God's work of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom was not necessarily restricted to them. It was available to anyone who truly believed. Obviously, Jesus is not endorsing anyone who just claims to follow Him. Consider Jesus' statements regarding false prophets during Israel's last days (i.e. Daniel's 70th Week) in Matthew 24:4-5, 11, and 23-26 with special emphasis upon verse 24. The parallel passage in Mark is found in Mark 13:22.

Tasteless Salt (9:49-50)

This pericope is not included in the other Gospel narratives. In context, Jesus has just exhorted His hearers that any unbeliever who causes one of His disciples ("little ones") to sin (i.e. sins of omission and sins of commission) will, as a result of their unbelieving status, suffer the judgment of hell fire. [For a full development of this topic, see our notes from the study of Matthew 18:6-9]. Mark adds Jesus' statements in verses 49-50 to illustrate that not only will unbelievers be judged, but believers will experience a judgment also. While believers of the Church Age have the Bema seat judgment, Age of Israel believers will experience a similar judgment for the purpose of rewards. The judgment of Age of Israel believers will occur at the Second Advent of Christ which concludes the Age of Israel (i.e. with Daniel's 70th Week) and inaugurates the Messianic and millennial reign of Christ. It may also be possible that Jesus was referring to the trials that all (believer and unbeliever) face; however, considering the previous focus upon eternal judgment, I prefer to interpret this as a reference to the fact that all will experience an eternal judgment – unbelievers for eternal hell and believers for eternal rewards.

Jesus' Teaching on Divorce (10:1-12)

Within Jewish religious circles there were roughly two opposing camps regarding the issue of divorce. Both the Rabbinic school of Hillel and Shammai permitted divorce of the woman by the man on the grounds of "something indecent" in Deuteronomy 24:1. However, they disagreed on what "indecent" might include.

- The school of Shammai interpreted "something indecent" to refer to any gross indecency to include adultery.
- The school of Hillel interpreted "something indecent" to refer to almost any kind of real or imagined offense, e.g. an improperly cooked meal or even becoming less attractive to the man.

The result of these positions of course led to very frequent divorces within the Pharisaic community to the point of divorce becoming a scandal. For instance, Josephus, a Pharisee who was himself a divorcee, viewed divorce to be permitted for any reason whatsoever.

No doubt, all of this is part of the background behind even the wording of the Pharisee's question. They viewed divorce as some type of privilege instead of God's means of last resort. **For a more complete analysis on this discourse, see the notes from Matthew 19:1-10.**

The Bottom Line: In **verse 5**, Jesus is explaining the **Mosaic Law** that they **should** have been practicing. He is **not** explaining **Kingdom Truth** to be applied by the Messianic community of believing Israel during the Age of the Messianic Kingdom. In **verses 11-12**, Jesus is explaining **Kingdom Truth** applicable to the Messianic kingdom. In other words, the Kingdom Truth that Jesus taught was a higher set of principles than how the Mosaic Law had been interpreted.

- The religious leaders of Israel had selfishly interpreted “uncleanness” in Deuteronomy 24:1 included any selfish reason for divorcing a wife.
- The Mosaic Law allowed a woman so divorced to remarry (Deut 24:2-3), but she was prohibited from remarrying her 1st divorcing husband.
- Jesus did not attempt to define what constituted “uncleanness” per the Mosaic Law in Deuteronomy 24:1.
- Jesus only indicated that what had been “permitted” in the Mosaic Law was due to the “hardness of heart” (v 8) of the Jews. [This was a consistent point of contrast between Jesus’ teaching regarding Kingdom Law and the distorted applications of the intent of the Mosaic Law by the Jews].
- I believe that God’s reason for allowing a divorce in such cases relates to His purpose for Israel as a nation in that Age or Dispensation of human history.
 - Think of the implications upon Israel as a nation to be a light to the Gentiles if the marriages of Israel were in a shambles due to a non-spiritual life (hardness of heart) on the part of one or both spouses.
 - Think of the case where the husband was not a spiritual man and the wife was a spiritual woman and the husband desired to divorce the wife. What recourse did the wife have? None, but to accept the certificate of divorce and remarry.
 - God knew that in the second marriage (although not His desire for marriage) there would be at least an opportunity to preserve the happiness of the woman through a second marriage to a spiritual man, thus allowing that one marriage to contribute to the nation being a light unto the Gentiles.
- In both the Mosaic Law passage that serves as the background (Deut 24:1-4) and in Jesus’ teaching of Kingdom Truth (Mk 10:11-12 cf. Matt 19:9), the divorce appears to occur after marriage and not just during the betrothal period as some contend (see Deut 24:1 – “sends her out of his house”).
 - Under the Mosaic Law, there was a procedure established for a husband who had no proof, but suspected his wife of infidelity (Num 5:11-31). However, this portion of the Mosaic Law has no direct relationship with our passage in Mark 10 or the parallel passage in Matthew 19.
 - The Mosaic Law included provisions for sexual unfaithfulness on the part of the bride during the betrothal period (Deut 22:13-30). However, in my opinion, Deuteronomy 22:13-30 has no direct relationship to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 19.
 - The word translated “sexual immorality” in Matthew 19:9 is the Greek word $\rho\omicron\rho\upsilon\tau\eta$ (*porneia*) and refers to any kind of unlawful sexual intercourse, e.g. prostitution, fornication or adultery.
 - It is distinct from the Greek word for adultery ($\mu\omicron\iota\chi\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\iota\sigma$ *moicheuein*) which is a specific reference to sex outside of the marriage by a marriage partner. However, *porneia* includes adultery even if not restricted to it.
 - Therefore, the Greek word that Jesus used to refer to “sexual immorality” in His teaching of Kingdom Truth can refer to fornication prior to marriage, fornication during the betrothal period, or adultery after marriage. The Mosaic Law backdrop for this passage would seem to give more weight to an interpretation that Jesus was teaching a Kingdom Truth principle regarding rationale for divorce after marriage.

- Finally, the Kingdom Truth that Jesus teaches establishes a norm of behavior that is far above either the Mosaic Law or the distortions of the Mosaic Law by the religious leaders of Israel in their selfish interpretation of “uncleanness.” Kingdom Law states that:
 - A husband is not to divorce his wife except for sexual unfaithfulness of any type.
 - If the husband divorces his wife for any other cause and marries another, he has committed adultery.
 - If the wife guilty of sexual unfaithfulness who has been divorced marries another, she has committed adultery.
 - This passage does not indicate whether the husband who legitimately divorces his wife in the Kingdom has the right to remarry; however, it may be implied.
 - In this passage, Jesus does not mention capital punishment for adultery (Deut 22:22) or fornication during the betrothal period (Deut 22:21, 24) as does the Mosaic Law.
 - Those aspects of Kingdom Truth that need further clarification will no doubt be the subject of the additional revelation to come during the Messianic Reign of Christ (e.g. Joel 2).
- Jesus’ Kingdom teaching (Matt 19:9 cf. Mark 10:1-12) would have been a direct indictment of the religious Jewish leaders who were not living lives that characterized a mindset receptive to the Kingdom.
- The mindset receptive to the Kingdom (e.g. Matt 5:3-12) that Jesus offered would not look for any selfish reason to divorce a wife.
- Just because the Kingdom Truth that Jesus taught permitted divorce, it doesn’t mean that Kingdom Truth required divorce in the case of sexual immorality.

Similarities and Differences With Church Age Truth – Perhaps the most relevant passage that provides guidance regarding divorce and remarriage in the Church Age is 1 Corinthians 7:10-16. In this passage, divorce is permitted under special circumstances. Paul’s teaching includes two perspectives:

- God’s sovereign desire is that a husband and wife are not to divorce in the Church Age. See 1 Corinthians 7:10-11. (Same as other dispensations).
- If a husband and wife get a divorce, then they have two options:
 - Be reconciled to each other (verse 11)
 - Remain unmarried (verse 11)
- If they were married as unbelievers and later one of them becomes a believer, then the believer is to remain with the unbelieving spouse as long as the unbelieving spouse is willing (see verses 12-14).
- If the unbelieving spouse departs the marriage, the believing spouse must allow him or her to depart (see verse 15).
- The believer should remain unmarried as long as the unbeliever doesn’t remarry so as to allow for reconciliation (verse 11 cf. verse 16)
 - The passage does not indicate whether the believer can remarry someone else if the unbeliever marries someone else after the first divorce.
 - However, if the former husband dies, the implication is that the believing spouse could remarry (v. 39).
- God is most interested in peace in the home (verse 15).
- Other than the case of the unbeliever leaving the believer, there are no conditions specified to legitimize divorce in the Church Age.
 - However, in this Age of the Church, believers live by means of the Spirit; therefore, each believer will need to determine for himself/herself whether divorce should be pursued based upon the Spirit’s ministry in the believer’s life.
- If the believer does divorce, this passage indicates that he/she is to remain unmarried (verse 11).
 - The passage doesn’t address many circumstances involving believers such as spousal abuse, a non-spiritual believer spouse leaving a spiritual spouse, etc.
 - The ability of the spiritual believer to tolerate the marriage will be related to the level of the spiritual believer’s spiritual growth and guidance from the Holy Spirit.

- The issue of adultery or sexual immorality (Matt 19:9) is not addressed as it was in Jesus' teaching regarding Kingdom Truth. This too will relate to the spiritual believer spouse's ability to tolerate.

The Fig Tree Cursed (11:12-14)

An examination of the context of these verses in the parallel passage in Matthew (i.e. Matt 21:18-19) helps set the stage for this incident. The religious leaders of Israel had failed to exercise faith in Jesus. They had all of the outward signs of fruit bearing (the temple, feast days, the Law, priesthood, etc.); however, they bore no fruit. The fig tree had all of the outward signs of fruit bearing; however, it bore no fruit.

Mark notes that "it was not the season for figs" in his narrative. Why should Jesus curse a fig tree for not bearing fruit when it was not the season for fruit? The tree stood out because of its leaves, i.e. signs of fruitbearing. It promised a show of fruitbearing, but actually produced no fruit. I don't believe that Jesus' cursing of the fig tree represented a cursing of all of Israel. I believe that Jesus' cursing of the fig tree represented a cursing of the religious leaders who were hypocrites within Israel. This is more consistent with the narrative and connects very well with the rejection of Jesus by the religious leaders.

The Widow's Two Mites (12:41-44)

This pericope is not found in Matthew's Gospel. In context, Jesus has just warned His hearers about the hypocrisy and deceitful practices of the religious leaders. One of the practices included taking advantage of the widows who helped feed and support them (v. 40). In verses 41-44, Jesus finds an illustration that to whom much has been given, much is expected (Lu 12:48). In God's system, eternal reward is connected to how one uses that with which he/she has been blessed in time.

The motivation for such service can only result from a love for the Lord that is willing to by-pass otherwise legitimate worldly use of these resources and blessings. God desires such personal sacrifices to be voluntary in contrast to Satan's counterfeit system that includes non-voluntary participation, e.g. the progressive tax system. In God's system and timing, the Messianic kingdom would have come to Israel had Israel possessed a love for Him as manifested by this widow. Satan's counterfeit plan is based upon Satan's deceit that man can create a utopian environment which not only causes man to loose focus upon the need for a Savior, but is consistent with Satan's claim that he would become like the most High God (Isa 14:14).

The Parable of the Fig Tree (13:28-31)

- The fig tree is not Israel in this passage. The fig tree is just an analogy for Jesus' lesson.
- When the fig tree puts on leaves, anyone knows that summer is soon to come.
- In the same way, when these prophecies transpire, the disciples would have known that the Second Advent is at hand.
- The phrase "this generation" has two acceptable explanations:
- It can mean "race" as in the Jewish race, OR it can mean the generation that sees these prophecies fulfilled.

A Non-Canonical Passage (16:9-20)

This section of Mark's Gospel doesn't exist in the best ancient Greek manuscripts. While it is strange and there has been much speculation as to why Mark would have ended his Gospel account in 16:8 with a statement that the two Marys "were afraid", the fact remains that verses 9-20 are not found in such great ancient manuscripts as Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus of

the 4th Century. In addition, many of the manuscripts which do contain these verses have notes which indicate that older Greek manuscripts do not contain the verses.¹

¹ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament, Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 42, 47, & 226. Metzger devotes several pages to a discussion of this passage in Mark's Gospel. As he moves toward the conclusion of his analysis, he makes the following statement on page 228 – "Both external and internal considerations lead one to conclude that the original text of the Second Gospel, as known today, closes at xvi. 8....It appears, therefore, that the text of Mark xvi. 8 does not represent what Mark intended to stand at the end of his Gospel. Whether he was interrupted while writing and subsequently prevented (perhaps by death) from finishing his literary work, or whether the last leaf of the original copy was accidentally lost before other copies had been made, we do not know. All that is known is that more than one person in the early Church sensed that the Gospel is a torso and tried in various ways to provide a more or less appropriate conclusion."