

# Mark 9

by John Nelson Darby

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*The sermon explores the significance of the transfiguration, the resurrection of the dead, and the importance of faith in relation to the power of God, ultimately leading to the work of redemption.*

**Scripture:** Mark 9:1

**Topics:** "The Glory of God", "Faith and Healing"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the significance of the Transfiguration of Jesus as a revelation of His divine glory, intended to strengthen the faith of His disciples and foreshadow the coming of His kingdom. He explains that while Moses and Elijah represent the law and the prophets, it is Jesus alone who fulfills God's will and reveals the truth. The sermon highlights the necessity of faith in accessing Christ's power, as demonstrated through the healing of a boy possessed by an evil spirit, and underscores the importance of humility and the cross in the life of a believer. Darby concludes by reminding the congregation that true greatness in the kingdom of God is found in servanthood and that believers must remain vigilant against sin and strive for holiness.

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## Transcript

Now the Lord finds the occasion to manifest this personal glory of His to establish the disciples' faith, and also to shew that His presence in grace as Messiah, in the midst of Israel, was soon to come to an end; and that the new glory of the Son of man with His own was soon to be inaugurated, although it would be necessary to await the time when all the co-heirs should be gathered together. "Verily I say unto you," says the Lord, "There be some of them that stand here which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." Six days afterwards the Lord went up into a mountain with Peter, James, and John, and was transfigured before them; His raiment became shining and exceeding white as snow; Elias and Moses appeared with Him glorified in like manner, speaking with Him. We know that this apparition was the manifestation of Christ's glorious reign over the earth.

We read in 2 Peter 1-16, "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his Majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased'; and this voice which came from heaven we heard when we were with him in the holy mount." These are the words of the apostle Peter when he relates that which happened to him when he saw the wonderful vision of the mountain of the

transfiguration. From this we learn what the kingdom is as regards its manifestation upon earth, for they were upon earth. The bright cloud which covered them was the Father's dwelling-place, whence the voice came and into which, according to Luke, they had entered.

What a privilege for poor mortals, for sinners to have been able to gaze upon the Son of God in glory, and to have been manifested with Him in the same glory upon earth; to be His companions, to converse with Him; to possess the testimony that they have been loved as He has been loved (John 17:23); to be with Him, and like Him in everything as Man, for His own glory; wonderful proof of the value of the redemption He has accomplished! And the nearer we shall be to Him, the more shall we adore Him, being with Him as we shall be in the Father's house. But here our evangelist does not speak of their entering; comparing however Luke 9 we find it nevertheless true that they entered into the cloud out of which came the Father's voice.

274 It was according to God's counsel that we should be with Christ, the second Man, the last Adam, and in the same glory with Him. We are predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son in order that He may be the first-born among many brethren. It is for this that He became man: He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one, for which cause He is not ashamed to call us brethren. What would a Redeemer be without His redeemed? It is most certainly a far better thing to be a companion of the Lord Jesus in the Father's house, than co-heir of His glory before the world: yet both the one thing and the other are wonderful for poor creatures like ourselves. Elias and Moses are in the same glory; and we shall be like Him when He shall appear.

But the Lord's personal glory is always maintained; Peter wishes to make three tabernacles, putting Christ, Moses, and Elias upon the same footing - the three grand characters of Israel's history. But Moses and Elias disappear immediately, and the Father's voice recognises Jesus as His beloved Son; it is to Jesus' testimony that we must listen. All that Moses and Elias said is the truth, God's word, and by their means we learn God's thoughts; but they give testimony to Christ, not with Him. It is from Him alone that we learn fully the will of God, and His truth fully revealed. Jesus is the truth, and grace and truth came by Him. The death of Christ, His resurrection and completed redemption have put everything upon a new footing for men.

The believers who lived before the Lord's coming, believed in the promises and prophecies which announced His arrival; and they were accepted by faith; their sins committed during the time of God's patience, and which He bore with because He knew what He would do later on, are forgiven; and God's righteousness in forgiving them is manifested, now that Christ has died. But now God's righteousness is manifested, and the power of divine life is shewn forth in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. All is new in our relationship with God; the veil is rent, and we enter freely into the holiest. "The righteousness of God without law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets." Behold Moses and Elias; but the glory in which both Moses and Elias appeared is the fruit, not of the law nor of the prophets, but of the work of Jesus Christ; and one can only possess it in the resurrection state. The Lord's resurrection too was absolutely necessary, as being the power of life beyond death, and as a proof that God had accepted the death of Christ as having answered to the question of sin. The glory belonged to another world, gained for those who believe by the sacrifice of Christ, the Son of God, although this had to be fulfilled in this world. It belongs, therefore, to the state into which Christ, the second Adam, has entered by resurrection, and is based upon accomplished redemption.

275 Thus, although this was well-suited to strengthen the faith and increase the intelligence of these three, columns of the future church, it was not to be talked about before the Lord's resurrection, and Jesus forbade the disciples to tell the things they had seen until the Son of man should be raised from among the dead. Notice the expression, "The disciples kept these words to themselves, asking one another what the rising from the dead should mean." This indeed throws quite a new light upon the resurrection. Christ rose alone from amongst the dead, and left all the others in the grave; and His resurrection is a proof that the God of righteousness has accepted His work - His sacrifice - as a full and entire satisfaction given to His righteousness and His holiness; and the man who believes in Him is accepted according to the value of Christ's sacrifice.

The resurrection of the faithful also takes place, because God is fully satisfied as to them because of Christ's work. These alone will be raised when the Lord comes, to be for ever with Him. All the disciples believed in the resurrection of the dead, having been taught thus by the Pharisees; they were not like the Sadducees, but believed that all the Jews would be raised at once; and they did not understand the meaning of a resurrection which should separate the good from the bad, and should leave the latter behind for a certain time. Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection of the saints, not of the wicked. Those who are Christ's shall rise at His coming, and their vile body shall be changed and made like unto His glorious body. There are many Christians who, like the disciples, do not understand the Lord's words. One finds many Christians who have a faith like that of the Pharisees; they believe indeed that there will be a resurrection. and, like Martha, that all will rise at the last day. The only difference is that Martha and the Jews believed in the resurrection of the Jews only; and these Christians believe in a resurrection where good and bad will be raised together.

276 It is quite true that all will rise, but true faith in Christ (notice, dear reader), true faith makes the distinction already. The unbeliever remains in his sins, and will rise for the judgment, and the true believer will rise for the resurrection of life; he will rise (as we find in 1 Cor. 15) in glory. When the Lord comes, He will change our vile body and fashion it like unto His glorious body. Christ is the first-fruits of the resurrection, but certainly not of the wicked: in no part of the word do we find a common resurrection of good and bad: we find in Luke 14:14, a resurrection of the just, and again (20:35), "they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from among the dead." Thus we find expressly in 1 Corinthians 15, "Every man in his own order, Christ the first-fruits, afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming."

Thus also in 1 Thessalonians 4, "The dead in Christ shall rise first": it is always thus. People quote Matthew 25, but in that chapter it is no question of resurrection, nor of raised bodies; it is not a universal judgment, but a judgment of Gentiles upon the earth, of those to whom the everlasting gospel of Revelation 14 had been sent at the end of the age. There are not two classes only here, but three; the sheep, the goats, and the brethren of the Judge. The principle of the judgment here is not the principle of a universal judgment. It is just according to the manner in which they have received and esteemed the Judge's brethren; that is, the messengers of the everlasting gospel, called in Matthew 24:14, "this gospel of the kingdom."

The principles of the general judgment of the nations are explained in Romans 1 and 2; these are quite different. I speak of Matthew 25 because it is the only passage that is quoted as a reply to the uniform testimony of the Holy Scriptures to a distinct resurrection of believers, according to the declaration of John 5:24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death unto life." We shall all appear

before the judgment-seat of Christ, certainly, and every one will give account of himself to God. But when the believers shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, they will have been glorified already, raised in glory, and made like unto the glory of Christ, as man. "When he shall appear, we shall be like him" - it is for this that "every one who hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

277 The first coming of Christ put away sin as regards judgment; for believers He will appear the second time unto perfect salvation to receive them to Himself, to glorify them. Their spirits are with Him in heaven, whilst they await this hour-the resurrection of their bodies will take place when He shall return, and then we shall all be for ever with the Lord. When glorified however, we shall give account of everything; we shall know as we have been known. There is thus a resurrection from among the dead.

The difficulty of which the scribes talked (that Elias ought to come before the Messiah) presents itself to the disciples. Now the scribes still exercised great influence over the disciples. And in truth, this is to be found in Malachi's prophecy; it will be surely fulfilled, whatever the manner of fulfilment may be, before the Lord's coming in glory. But He came first in humiliation, and hidden, as it were, as to His external glory; He entered by the door as the shepherd of the sheep, in order that faith seeing through the darkness of His position and of His daily life, might discern not merely a Messiah, come to Israel according to the promises, but the love and power of God Himself - and might find itself in the presence of His holiness.

The Jews would have received with joy a Messiah who should liberate them from the Roman yoke; but the presence of God is unsupportable for men, even when He appears amongst them in goodness. To the coming which is still future, the Lord alludes when He says in Matthew 10:23, "For I tell you ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel until the Son of man be come." But now He appears in humility, made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death; that is, in order to be able to suffer. Thus also John the Baptist comes in the spirit and power of Elias, according to Isaiah 11 and Malachi 3, to prepare the way of the Lord. Thus the Lord answers; John must come; the scribes are right; John shall come and restore all things. But it was necessary too that the Son of man should suffer, and that He should be thoroughly despised. "But I tell you that Elias hath already come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed."

278 But if the Lord was manifested in His glory before the disciples' eyes in the transfiguration, He occupies Himself now with the misery of the earth; and that which took place is very remarkable for the display of His patience, and of the ways of God. When He comes down from the mountain, He finds a great crowd, and the scribes reasoning with His disciples. It is blessed to notice that if the Lord is recognised as Son of God, and will be manifested in glory, and we with Him, He nevertheless comes down into this world - as He does still by His Spirit - and meets with the crowd and the power of Satan for us; and again (it is well for us to notice it) He speaks as intimately with His disciples as He does with Moses and Elias. Oh, how great is His grace! But the exercise of this grace develops the position and state of man and of the disciples.

A poor father has recourse to the Lord for his suffering son, who is possessed of an evil spirit, and cannot speak. He tells the Lord that he had brought him to the disciples, and that they could not cast out the unclean spirit. This is their position; not only does the Lord encounter unbelief, but although divine power be in the earth, believers even do not know how to use it; it was in vain then that the Lord was present in the world. He could work miracles, but man did not know how to profit by this, or to use it by faith. It was a faithless generation; and He could not stay down here. It was not the presence or the power of the devils that drove Him away, for indeed it was this that brought Him down here; but when His own do not know

how to profit by the power and the blessing which He has brought into the world and placed in their midst, the dispensation characterised by these gifts must be drawing to its close. And this, not because there is unbelief in the world, but because He own cannot realise the power placed at their disposal; and in consequence the testimony of God falls to the ground destroyed, instead of being established; since the followers of this testimony meet with the power of the enemy and cannot do anything - the enemy is too strong for them.

"O faithless generation," says the Lord, "how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?" His service upon earth was finished. But see the patience and goodness of the Lord; He cannot deny Himself. All the time He is down here upon earth He works according to His power and grace, and that notwithstanding the unbelief of His own. He finishes the sentence in which He reproves their unbelief in this manner - "Bring him to me." Faith, however small it be, is never left without an answer from the Lord. What a consolation! whatever be the unbelief, not only of the world, but of Christians - if only one solitary person were left in the world who had faith in the goodness and power of the Lord Jesus, he could not come to Him with a real need and simple belief without finding His heart ready and His power sufficient.

The church may be in ruins, as was Israel, but the Head is sufficient for everything, knows the state of His own, and will not fail to supply their needs. The child's state was very dangerous, and the devil had possessed him from his infancy. The father's faith was feeble, but sincere; he says to the Lord, "If thou canst do anything, have pity upon us, and help us." The Lord's reply is remarkable: "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." Power connects itself with faith; the difficulty is not in Christ's power, but in man's believing; all things were possible if he could believe. This is an important principle; Christ's power never fails to accomplish all that is good for man; faith, alas! may be wanting in us to profit by it. However the Lord is full of goodness; the poor father says with tears, "I believe, help thou mine unbelief": sincere words from a moved heart in which the Lord had already awakened faith. It was the anxiety for his son that weakened this faith.

Now the Lord, avoiding the empty curiosity of the people, thinking rather of the needs of the father and son, commands the unclean spirit with authority to come out and not to enter again into the child. And he comes out of him, shewing at she same time his power (tearing the child, so as to leave him as dead), but absolutely subject to the Lord's authority. It is very beautiful to see that the Lord upon leaving the glory went to meet the unbelief of the world and of His own, and the weakness of the faith of those who have need of it, and that too in the presence of the enemy's great power. The Lord does not keep at a distance from us, He takes part in our sorrows, He encourages our weak faith, and with a single word drives away all the power of the enemy. Neither His own glorious state, nor the unbelief of the world which rejected Him, prevented Him from being the refuge and the remedy for the poorest faith. He interests Himself in us, thinks of us, and helps us.

280 Although the Lord be placed in glory according to His rights, these do not weaken His love for poor human-kind. But again we find an important lesson at the end of this history. Energetic faith which works (whether the miracles which happened at that time or the great things of the kingdom of God) is sustained by intimate communion with God, by prayer and fasting. The heart comes out from God's presence to drive away the enemy's power; but whatever might be the Lord's grace, whatever His power, a greater work had to be accomplished, a great work for the Lord Himself, a work of which He alone was capable - difficult indeed for the heart of man to learn, but absolutely necessary for the glory of God and for our redemption and salvation: a lesson which one must learn in order to walk in the Lord's ways. This is the work of the cross; and the wholesome lesson it teaches us is this - that we must bear our own cross.

Now that the future glory, the glory of the kingdom, has been revealed; - now that the Lord has shewn forth His power and His perfect goodness in spite of the unbelief of the world, and of His departure after having been rejected by the world - He takes His disciples aside, passing through Galilee to make them understand that the Son of man would be given into the hands of men who would put Him to death. He speaks of His title as Son of man, because He could not any longer remain upon earth as the promised Messiah, but He must accomplish the work of redemption. However after that He should have been put to death, He would rise again on the third day. Behold then redemption completed and everything made new: man is put upon an entirely new footing, at least the believer in Jesus.

Risen man does not stand upon the same footing as Adam in his innocence. I do not speak now of the lost, although it be true for them, but it is quite a different thing. Adam was in the natural blessing of a creature, but his faithfulness was put to the proof, a proof in which he failed. True enough the sinner is not in the condition of the redeemed; but in Adam's case all depended upon his responsibility. In Christ risen man had been fully tried and shewn to be perfect, proved even unto death, where He glorified God Himself. Further, He bore our sins and put them away for ever; He submitted to death, but has conquered it, and has come forth out of it; He has borne the stroke of God's judgment against sin. Satan had already employed all his power as the prince of this world, in the death of Jesus, although it was not possible that He should be holden of death: so that instead of being under trial where He had placed Himself in His love for us and in order to glorify His Father, Jesus risen (and we in Him by faith and by the hope which the Holy Ghost who unites us to Jesus inspires) is beyond the reach of all these things.

281 Death, to which Adam subjected himself through sin, is conquered, our sins are abolished before God; we are perfected for ever as to our conscience; a new state of life has begun for us, a life which is entirely new and heavenly; and heavenly glory at the end, already realised for Christ there where He was with the Father before the foundation of the world. "As He is," says John, "so are we in this world" (that is, as in the presence of God's judgment) - and we await the resurrection of the body. But Christ's position as a glorified man, is the fruit of having fully glorified God; and we, sharing His life by the operation of the Holy Spirit, participate in the fruit of His work already at this present time, as to our position before God; and later we shall be like unto Him perfectly. Adam's state when innocent was happy, but it depended upon his obedience. Christ's state as man is the fruit of an obedience perfectly complete, after it had been proved even to the point of drinking the cup of death and of malediction, when He was made sin for us.

The first state was exposed to change, and complete ruin came in by the fall; the other remains unchangeable, established upon a work that can never lose its value. We are already brought, by participating in the life of Jesus, into the relationships into which He introduces us with the Father. "I ascend," said He after His resurrection, "to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God." Only in order to accomplish all this it was necessary for Him to pass through death, to bear the cross, in order to drink the cup which His Father had given Him. He engages them then with the cross, and teaches them to expect it. But what a thing man is! We learn it in what follows.

The Lord, having the consciousness of His glory in which the Father had recognised Him a little while ago as His beloved Son, and knowing at the same time that this glory made the cross absolutely necessary to bring many sons to glory, speaks of it to His disciples; He insists that it will be necessary for them to carry it. Such was the path of the glory of which His own death was the foundation. The Lord's heart was full of the thought of the sufferings which accompanied it; of the cup He had to drink, and of the necessity of His disciples' understanding this path, and of taking up their cross. But of what were the disciples' hearts full? They were thinking who should be the greatest. Alas, how incapable our heart is to receive God's

thoughts, to think of a Saviour humbled unto death for us! It is true that the Spirit of God puts in contrast here the reign of Messiah which the Jews expected, and the glorious heavenly reign which the Lord was establishing, and for which His death was necessary; but the contrast comes out strongly thus in the heart of man. He would like to be great in a kingdom established according to man's glory and man's power; he esteems it a good thing that God should condescend to this; but that His glory should be morally exalted and established, and the vain glory of man brought to nought, the manifestation of what man is; the love, holiness, and justice of God brought to light - all this is what man neither seeks nor desires; and when the Lord's heart, full of these solemn truths and of the sufferings by which He must needs pass to fulfil them, speaks of them to His disciples, the latter dispute as to who shall be greatest. How poor and wretched a thing is man's heart!

282 What incapacity to understand God's thoughts, and to feel the tenderness and faithfulness of the heart of Jesus, and the thoughts passing through it; divine love manifesting itself in the heart of a Man, and as a Man in the midst of men, in which is found a moral incapacity to enter into His thoughts; but this opens the way at the same time to the manifestation of our thoughts which are in full contrast with those of Jesus. May God grant us in His grace to hold the flesh so entirely subject, that the Holy Spirit may be the source of all our thoughts and of the movements of our hearts. Nevertheless the conscience does not keep silence if the Lord's word touches us: we know well that the desire of vain glory is a bad thing, that it is not meet for Christ, for Him who speaks, and we are ashamed. The disciples are silent because their conscience speaks.

283 Now the patient love of the Lord sets itself to teach them; He sits down (v. 35), and calls the twelve: He always thinks of us. He then teaches several principles, in which we see the consequences of the world's opposition to Christ, and the introduction of a new relationship with God in Christ risen; these principles demand some explanation. The important point here, the foundation of all the Lord's exhortations, and of all He says is this, that the glory of the kingdom to come has been revealed, and with this revelation comes the cross. It is the end of all the relationships between God and Israel, and indeed between God and man, except indeed that of sovereign grace, and the principle of a new and heavenly relationship by faith. But Christ, the Messiah according to the promises in Israel, God manifest in flesh, the last hope for man as he was upon earth, was rejected. The relationship between God and man was broken. Could one seek glory upon an earth of this kind? What kind of disposition is fitting for a disciple of Christ? Humility: he who would be first shall be the last and servant of all. Then He takes a child and declares that he who receives such an one in His name receives Christ; and he who receives Christ receives the Father who sent Him. The name of Christ is the touch-stone, the only thing upon earth really great by faith.

Then we find a reproof for a thing which in itself was love, though rough and coarse, but which dresses itself in very deceitful forms, and seems to consider Christ's glory; for love in itself is not upright: it is quite disposed to maintain the glory of Christ's name, if it can attach itself to this glory. "We saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us, and we forbade him because he followeth not us." See here the word "us" betrays the most subtle love of self: subtle, it is true, but none the less dangerous. But the Lord's answer shews how absolute is His rejection: "He who is not against us is on our part," because the whole world in its natural state was against Christ, and is still against Him; and no one could perform miracles in His name and at the same time speak evil or lightly of Him. The name of Christ is everything. Let us avoid this wretched "us," and hold fast to Christ.

Verse 41 shews how the name of Christ is everything in a world which has rejected Him.

284 But what a testimony to man's state, and to his inward opposition to God revealed in Christ! If any one was not against Him, he was for Him, otherwise he was completely God's enemy. Some important consequences follow this state: first of all the least manifestation of love for Him, which interested itself in Him, having the power of His name at heart, should not be forgotten before God. What a picture of the state of things and of the patience of Christ, who humbled Himself even to being rejected and despised, yet does not forget the least token of affection for Him, and of desire for His glory! Now we see another consequence of this position. The Lord does not wish that a little child who believes in Him should be despised; He esteems these, because their hearts recognise His name, believe in Him; and hence they have a great value before God. Woe be to him who despises them and who places a stone of stumbling before their feet; it would have been better for such an one to have been drowned in the depth of the sea. And nevertheless, as regards themselves, all depends upon the faithfulness of Christ; and on this account they need free themselves from all the things which tend to separate from Christ, which lead into sin, and bring on apostasy in the heart as well as outward apostasy. God will keep His own, I believe, but He will keep them in making them obedient to His word.

However much it may cost us, if it should be an eye that offends us, we must pluck it out; if a hand, we must cut it off; in a word, the most valuable thing possible; for an eternity of blessing with Christ is better than to keep a right hand and to find oneself in eternal torments, "where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched." Besides this, God puts all to the proof: the fire of His judgment is applied to all, both to saints and sinners. In the saints, it consumes the dross, in order that the pure gold may shine in its true lustre; in the case of sinners, the fire of God and the eternal pains according to His just judgment, fire that is not quenched. "Every sacrifice must be salted with salt"; this refers to Leviticus 2:13. The salt represents the power of the Holy Spirit, not exactly to produce grace alone, but to keep us from all that is impure, and to produce holiness in a heart devoted to God, and which introduces God into its path; and in the heart there is a link with Himself which keeps us from all corruption. We are called to keep this in the heart, and to apply the sense of His presence to all that passes within us, and to judge by this means all that is within us.

285 But observe that the believer is the true sacrifice offered to God. "I beseech you," says the apostle in Romans 12, "then, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." Here we see the true sacrifice, a reasonable service: and besides, this holy grace, which keeps us from all that is evil and impure, makes good its influence within us; and the Christian filled with practical holiness is a witness in the world. This indeed is the true state of Christians in this world; a witness in the midst of the world of a power which not only purifies but which keeps from the corruption in it. Salt influences other things and is apt to produce this effect; but if the salt itself lose its savour, wherewithal can it be seasoned? If Christians lose their practical holiness, what can they be good for? "Have salt in yourselves," said the Lord. He wishes us to exercise diligence in order that our souls, in our walk, may be thus sanctified before God, and then manifest themselves before the world; that we should judge in ourselves all that might diminish in us the clearness and purity of our testimony; and that we should walk with others in peace, governed by the spirit of peace in our relationships with them.

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