

The Saying Heard 'Round the World

By Jim Elliff



They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, **“The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.”** But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him. (Mark 9:30-32)

Read the passage above carefully. This is an intriguing moment in Jesus’ ministry concerning which three important questions beg to be answered.

Why did Jesus not want anyone to know where he was?

Jesus had just been on a “high mountain” where he was transfigured before Peter, James, and John. No doubt these three were still stunned. They saw Jesus glorified in blinding effulgence, along with Moses and Elijah. Imagine that! They even heard the Father speak, “This is my beloved son. Listen to him!” Peter said later that this experience was one of the main reasons his readers must listen to the disciples as people with exceptional authority (see 2 Peter 1:16-21).

That high mountain was likely one of the peaks of Mount Hermon in the very north of Israel. Jesus descended from this mountain into another remarkable experience — the healing of a child who was both deaf and dumb because of demons. It was one of the most amazing and instructive healings in Mark’s gospel.

Jesus was now passing through other parts of Galilee after a short rest in Capernaum on the north side of the Sea of Galilee. He tells us why he did not want anyone to know where he was: “He did not want anyone to know for he was teaching his disciples. . .” That teaching was about something which would change their future, our future, the world’s future. He could not be interrupted. It was the second time he mentioned this future event. Now he will make himself heard with a simple core statement. Here it is:

The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.

Why did the disciples not understand the saying?

You likely will say, “That’s all he said? I’ve known that for years!” Yes you have, at least most of you, but it was new to them. You take it as common; they were frozen in amazement. It was the most important statement to be announced to humans ever, and all he taught before led up to it.

Mark, the narrator of Peter’s teachings on Jesus, calls it “the saying,” indicating it was significant, and something that would be repeated many times. It was the heart of the gospel that Jesus would send his disciples to proclaim — the news about what Jesus had to do to redeem us from our bondage to sin. In this statement is the hope for mankind. Without this truth, there would be no salvation for anyone, including you. Many great sayings from Jesus would be repeated, but this is the foundation of them all.

But there is one more question to explore:

Why were the disciples afraid to ask Jesus any questions about the saying?

Perhaps we will have to query the disciples ourselves in the future about this. My sense is that they were stunned to silence already by this series of events. And now this! They knew the teaching of the prophet Daniel that one like “a son of man” will come before the Ancient of Days and be given authority over all the kingdoms of the world (see Daniel 7). They believed that Jesus was the Messiah. So, why would this Son of Man be killed by evil people and then rise again?

Jesus knew the answers and all the others that would arise from it, but they were paralyzed in their mere human reasoning. They should be quiet and listen, not speak out like Peter did foolishly on the mountain. “They did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.”

Eventually . . .

Eventually the apostles did understand. They learned it from Jesus himself both in his last days on earth before his death and in the 40 days of teaching they received after his resurrection and before his ascension. The teachings of the Law and the Prophets and the Songs began to make sense in light of these words. They talked with each other as well. By the time Pentecost came and the explosive days of the worldwide spread of the gospel commenced, they were ready.

The apostles would carry this saying of Jesus to the world, empowered by the Holy Spirit. And they themselves would be the witnesses of his resurrection to herald it faithfully at the expense of their lives.

Surely these are the most important words of Jesus — the saying heard ‘round the world.