

The crucifixion of Jesus as the fulfillment of Mark 9.1

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I. Introduction

Understanding Mark 9.1 presents a vexing problem for scholars, pastors, and laity alike. Its place in the Synoptic tradition, form, eschatology, purpose, and meaning are all widely disputed. Arguments based on the grammar of the text have failed to deliver a convincing solution. Similarly, appeals to either form critical or redactional studies have not won a consensus. The former argues that the logion is not authentic and simply reflects the concerns of the Markan community¹ whilst the latter believes that an original Parousia saying has been reinterpreted to refer to the transfigura-

tion.² Yet these points are clearly contestable, and with good reasons.³ Additionally, the problem is exacerbated by the plethora of solutions offered for its fulfillment, including: a realized eschatology,⁴ Pentecost and spread of the early church,⁵ the Parousia,⁶ resurrection,⁷ transfiguration,⁸ fall of Jerusalem⁹ and teach-

¹ Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 260; Norman Perrin, “Composition of Mark 9.1,” *NovT* 11 (1969): 67-70; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark* (London: SPCK, 1970), 178-79; John Painter, *Mark’s Gospel* (NTR; London/New York: Routledge, 1997), 128; Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1994), 54, 86-87. Cf. Hugh Andersen (*The Gospel of Mark* [NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981], 222) and Morna D. Hooker (*The Gospel According to St. Mark* [BNTC; London: A & C Black, 1991], 211) who leave open the question of authenticity.

² Enrique Nardoni, “A Redactional Interpretation of Mark 9.1,” *CBQ* 43 (1981): 380.

³ Cf. Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology For the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 466; W. G. Kummel, *Promise and Fulfillment* (SBT 23; London: SCM, 1966), 25-29.

⁴ C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (rev. ed.; London: Scribner’s, 1961), 43, 53-54; C. S. Mann, *Mark* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1986), 351; Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8.27-16.20* (WBC; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 29.

⁵ Ezra P. Gould, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1896), 159; F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1971), 208; Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: MacMillan, 1953), 385; James D. G. Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit: Pneumatology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 2.141; W. Hendriksen, *Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 333.

⁶ Dennis E. Nineham, *Saint Mark* (PNTC; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), 231-32; Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 212.

⁷ Archibald M. Hunter, *The Work and Words of Jesus*, (London: SCM, 1985), 97; Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark* (NIBC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1989), 143; J. J. Kilgallen, “Mark 9.1: The Conclusion of a Pericope,” *Bib* (1982): 81-83; Herman C. Waetjen, *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark’s Gospel* (Fortress: Minneapolis, 1989), 148.

⁸ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 287-88; James A. Brooks, *Mark* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 138-40; Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerd-

ings of Jesus.¹⁰ One might therefore choose to remain agnostic, as some have suggested, "In all fairness to the Scriptures it is best to avoid taking any overly decisive position, or the results may do violence, either to the predictions of Jesus or to the subsequent events of history."¹¹ Yet the logion is a *crux interpretum* for Markan studies and Synoptic eschatology. Degree of difficulty is not a sufficient reason to defer the task. The logion does not deserve to be ignored but rigorously explored, as the fruits of such labor may be plentiful indeed for understanding Mark's eschatology, Christology, and purpose.

A unique proposal is espoused by R. T. France who contends that the hiddenness of the kingdom of God was gradually being laid open and the mystery of its imminence discovered. The inbreaking of the kingdom with power can then be found in all of the events suggested for the fulfillment of 9.1. Within the lifetime of the disciples the process of the implementation of God's rule is going to be established in a way that is undeniable and enduring.

So Mark 9.1 should not be interpreted as a prediction of any one specific event, but of the new situation of the powerful implementation of divine government which would in many ways become visible before "some of those standing here" faced the martyrdom to which their following of Jesus committed them.¹²

Although France is correct that the kingdom of God is expressed in multiple events, he fails

to reckon with two factors. First, this understanding of the kingdom of God is so general as to be meaningless. When everything is the inbreaking of the kingdom of God in power, then nothing is sufficiently unique to describe the momentous action being envisaged by the logion. A qualitative distinction between the coming of the kingdom in power and other 'ordinary' displays of the kingdom (e.g., miracles) is implied. Second, it fails to come to terms with the prophetic hope for a definitive action whereby the covenant God would show that he is king. The coming of the kingdom is an epiphany of the salvation and power of Israel's God.¹³ A more profitable approach is one that will adequately address the uniqueness of the event being predicted and recognize its Jewish eschatological framework.

Another proposal is that the logion is fulfilled in the crucifixion where Jesus' death constitutes the coming of the kingdom of God in power. This position has been defended by Kent Brower, Paul Barnett, Ched Myers, and N. T. Wright, albeit from very different approaches.¹⁴ For Brower and Barnett it is through analysis of Mark's theology, for Myers by a liberationist reading, and for Wright via a historical study. In view of these attempts, it is the aim of this essay to pursue this solution further and expand the breadth of the argument. It will proceed by: (1) examining how Mark relates the kingdom of God and the cross together; (2) analyzing how the crucifixion may be regarded as a display of "power in powerlessness"; (3) exploring the literary context of 8.31–9.13; and (4) proposing a solution as to

mans, 2001), 259-62; William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 312-14.

⁹ R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1971), 140-42, 235-37. Cf. A. Plummer, *Luke* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1901), 250.

¹⁰ Mary Anne Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel* (Fortress: Minneapolis, 1989), 206-7.

¹¹ Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Mark* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961), 271.

¹² R. T. France, *Divine Government: God's Kingship in the Gospel of Mark* (Homebush West, NSW: Lancer, 1990), 70. For his argument see pp. 64-80.

¹³ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 6.

¹⁴ Kent Brower, "Mark 9.1-Seeing the Kingdom in Power," *JSNT* 6 (1980): 17-41; Paul Barnett, *The Servant King* (Sydney, NSW: AIO, 2000), 171-74; Ched Myers, *Binding the Strongman: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 248, 391-92; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 651.

how the promises of 9.1 are fulfilled in the crucifixion.

II. The Cross and the Kingdom of God

In Mark's gospel two prominent themes are Jesus' inauguration of the kingdom and his impending crucifixion. The question that remains is exactly how these two ideas interface with each other in Mark's story. For the kingdom motif appears almost incomplete as it is obscured by the mysterious relationship between the Messiah and his enthronement (cf 10.35-45; 11.1-11; 12.1-12,35-37; 13.26-27; 14.62).¹⁵ Similarly, the connection between Jesus' death and the kingdom is never directly spelled out. It is noteworthy then that there are several junctures at which the themes of cross and kingdom indirectly coalesce. Such convergences serve to elucidate the mystery of the kingdom and its relationship to Jesus' crucifixion.

A. Mark 2.18-22

Mark 2.18-22 is the third of five confrontation episodes in 2.1-3.34. Whereas several commentators perceive the pericope to be a Markan teaching about the place of fasting in the Christian community (cf Matt 6.16-18; Luke 18.12; Did. 8.1; Gospel of Thomas [...] 104),¹⁶ this is at variance with its narrative function to surreptitiously connect Yahweh, the destiny of Jesus and the "Day of the Lord" in the crucifixion. This can be demonstrated from three particular aspects. (1) The metaphor of the bridegroom harks back to texts such as Isa 61.10; 62.5 where Yahweh is the bridegroom and Israel the bride. On this occasion Jesus assumes the position of Yahweh by naming himself as the bridegroom. This act is not incongruent as

¹⁵ Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979), 187.

¹⁶ Painter, *Mark's Gospel*, 60; Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 97-100; Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark*, 68.

Jesus has already identified himself with Yahweh in his authoritarian actions as the Son of Man (forgiving sins 2.1-12; reinterpretation of the Sabbath 2.23-28).¹⁷ Thus, the fate that awaits the bridegroom, here identified as Jesus, equally pertains to that of Yahweh. (2) The prepositional phrase ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ("in that day") with the careful switch from the plural ἡμέραις ("days") to the singular ἡμέρᾳ ("day"), suggests an allusion to the OT "Day of the Lord" (cf Luke 17.22-24).¹⁸ Such a "Day" constitutes the coming of Yahweh to Zion as king.¹⁹ (3) This "day" is marked by the sudden disappearance of the bridegroom where... ("taken away") implies the abrupt and sorrowful nature of the taking (cf 14.53; 15.1). This is arguably a Markan foreshadowing device which looks forward to the crucifixion.²⁰

B. Mark 14.22-25

Mark 14.22-25 is bracketed by the foretelling of Judas' imminent betrayal of Jesus (vv. 17-21) and the prediction of Peter's denial (vv. 27-31). Jeremias has effectively argued that Mark's account is authentic and perhaps the most primitive of the Last Supper traditions.²¹ Traditionally, the Passover would include prayers of thanksgiving for Israel's liberation from Egypt, praise for Yahweh's kingship and

¹⁷ Cf. Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (London: Paternoster, 1998).

¹⁸ Brower, "Seeing the Kingdom in Power," 40.

¹⁹ The Day of the Lord occupies a central position in OT kingdom theology as it espouses the coming of salvation and judgment that is revealed when Yahweh comes and comes as King. The Day of the Lord is then the epiphany of God's kingship and provides the crucial connection between history and eschatology. Cf. Deut 33.25; Judg 5.4-5; Pss 18.7-15; 50.3-4; 96.12-13; 98.8-9; Isa 4.2-3; 24.21-23; 25.9-10; 26.21, 29.6; 35.4,10; 40.3-5, 9-11; 52.7-10; 59.15-21; 60.1-3; 62.10-11; 63.1-59; 64.1; 66.12-19; Ezek 39.8,28; 43.1-7; Joel 2.32; Amos 5.18-21,27; Mic 1.3-4; 4.6; Hab 2.16, 3.3-13; Zeph 1.14-18; 3.15; Hag 2.7-9; Zech 2.4-5,10-12; 8.2-3; 9.14-17; 14.1-5,9,16; Mal 3.1-2. Cf. G. E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 48-50; John Gray, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Reign of God* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 273.

²⁰ Cf. Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8.26* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1989), 113-14; Taylor, *St. Mark*, 211; Lane, *Mark*, 112-13.

²¹ Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (trans. Norman Perrin; NTL; London: SCM, 1966), 160ff.

the coming Messiah. Thus the Passover ritual has a direct focus on God's saving activity and kingdom. Jesus once more assumes the role and prerogatives of Yahweh by announcing a new exodus and initiating a new covenant. Jesus conceives of his mission, fulfilled in his death, from the viewpoint of the arrival of an eschatological covenant. Moreover, the concept of covenant is correlative to the kingdom of God as both espouse God's lordship and saving activity.²² Jesus speaks of his death as establishing a new order and fulfilling the hope of Israel by redeeming their sins and in doing so, he demonstrates the link between his death and the kingdom.

C. Mark 14.62

Jesus is delivered to his opponents (... ["led away"], 14.53; d. 2.20) and is subject to a trial which climaxes in the high priest's question of his messiahship and Jesus' reply in 14.61b-62. At this critical juncture, Jesus makes an audacious claim about his enthronement in the kingdom of God. The statement that Caiaphas will see "the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven" is generally taken to denote Jesus' post-resurrection exaltation (sitting) and Parousia (coming).²³ The Son of Man becomes the cosmic judge of the world whom Caiaphas will see at the last judgment.²⁴ Nevertheless, this view is unsatisfactory for three reasons. First, there is nothing that demands that the Son of Man's tenure as judge commences solely at the Parousia. In fact it is the role of the Son of Man to exercise authority amongst human beings where his very presence represents the commencement of the eschatologi-

cal judgment.²⁵ In Mark, Jesus' vocation as judge has already been exercised, but only after the public declaration of his messiahship could its eschatological implications be proclaimed. Second, the act of judgment being anticipated is definitely futuristic. However, the imagery and language of 15.33-34 suggest that the coming judgment of the Day of the Lord is manifested at Jesus' crucifixion.²⁶ Third, the regal aspect of the Son of Man requires far more attention, particularly given the allusion to Dan 7.13 (cf 4 Ezra 13.1-3; 1 En 46.1-6) which suggests that the major theme of the verse is the enthronement and the exaltation of the Son of Man rather than a second advent.²⁷ The platform for the manifestation of this enthronement and exaltation is most likely the crucifixion. Thus Caiaphas' allegation of blasphemy (v. 64) arises not from the imagery of Jesus as a heavenly judge, but from the claim that Jesus is about to be exalted and enthroned in a position that is exclusively Yahweh's.

3

This last aspect can be supported on several grounds: (1) The imagery of clouds may be apocalyptic symbols of Jesus' authority and kingly power,²⁸ confirming the enthronement as a reality,²⁹ or more likely, since the presence of clouds is often used to depict Yahweh in a position of royal power, it portrays Jesus enthroned in the place reserved for Yahweh (cf Deut 33.26; Exod 40.34; Ps 68.4; Isa 19.1; Dan 7.9; Rev 1.7). (2) Kee points out the emphasis

²² Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 546.

²³ See typically Raymond E. Brown, *Death of the Messiah* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1.494-504.

²⁴ Cranfield, *St. Mark*, 445.

²⁵ R. Maddox, "Function of the Son of Man According to the Synoptic Gospels," *NTS* 15 (1968): 57.

²⁶ Ernest Best, *The Temptation and the Passion* (3d ed.; Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 126; Brower, "Seeing the Kingdom in Power," 34, 37.

²⁷ Cf. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 526-28; Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 567-69.

²⁸ G. B. Caird and L. D. Hurst, *New Testament Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 377.

²⁹ W. Temple, cited by T. F. Glasson, "The Reply to Caiaphas (Mark XIV.62)," *NTS* 7 (1960): 89.

of 14.62 is not Jesus' heavenly location, but rather the visible and earthly display of his vindication to those who judge him and will be judged by him.³⁰ (3) Mark 10.35-40 intimately combines Jesus' glory with his death. No sooner has Jesus finished speaking about his imminent death and resurrection for the third time (10.32-34) than the two ambitious Zebedee lads attempt to beat the pack for the choice places in the new Jerusalem cabinet. The brothers express a selfish hope that the approaching δόξα ("glory") will spill over to them. Jesus makes no attempt to deny the imminent glory, but he radically redefines it around two important Jewish symbols: cup and baptism. The cup of wine is the cup of God's wrath which he shall also have to agonize over in Gethsemane (cf Ps 75.8; Isa 51.17-23; Jer 25.15-28; 49.12; 51.7; Lam 4.21f; Ezek 23.31-34; Hab 2.16; Zech 12.2; Pss Sol 8.14f; 1QpHab 9.10-15). Baptism likewise contains a similar nuance of being overwhelmed with disaster (cf Ps 42.7; Isa 30.28; Luke 12.50).³¹ If such a naive request were to be granted, to sit at Jesus' right and left in his glory would entail sharing in his crucifixion (cf 15.27). Thus the brothers are ignorant of what they truly want, for to share in Jesus' glory means to embrace the same menacing destiny. There is no hint here of suffering as the antecedent to glory, but simply the equating of the two together. (4) The presence of the title "Son of Man" should not draw us to automatically infer that it is a Parousia reference as in 13.26. Like 8.38 where the immediate context concerns the ordained necessity of the cross for the Son of Man and the ethical corollary of cross bearing, the context here is likewise dominated by the impending sentence of crucifixion. Additionally, Mark's depiction of the Son of Man is not

so much that of a heavenly judge as that it espouses the one who is the authoritative presence of God and inaugurates the kingdom through his redemptive mission. (5) In continuity with the prophetic hope in which the divine savior enters only once into Jerusalem, so too can Jesus ascend only once to the heights of Jerusalem as king.³²

This proposal stands in contrast to the normal conceptions of the traditions about the Son of Man. Scholars predominantly maintain that the materials about the Son of Man as a suffering figure and an exalted being represent two separate traditions.³³ However, if the foregoing observations are correct then we have evidence of a Markan or even pre-Markan tradition which seamed these two traditions together to engender a unique portrait of the Son of Man whose sufferings comprise his exaltation and enthronement.³⁴

4

The Christological crux of Mark 15 is the kingship of Jesus.³⁵ Mark endeavors to demonstrate how the crucifixion represents the arrival of the kingdom of God in the death of Jesus. This is foreshadowed at the anointing of Jesus at Bethany which makes a furtive connection of Jesus' kingship and passion (14.3). What is also significant is that prior to chap. 15, Mark uses βασιλεὺς ("king") six times

³² Best, *The Temptation and the Passion*, 126.

³³ See typically Gunther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973 [1960]), 229-30; Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1963), 155-58.

³⁴ It is historically plausible that such a view originated with Jesus, as it is dissimilar from Jewish literature which could not conceive of suffering as glory and equally dissimilar from the tendency of later Christian tradition that emphasized Jesus' exaltation as being subsequent to his sufferings (e.g., Acts 2.32f; Phil 2.5-11). This perspective of suffering as exaltation is also attested by the independent Johannine tradition of Jesus' crucifixion comprising a display of his glory (John 12.23; 13.31). Cf. I. Howard Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990 [1976]), 76-80; Marinus de Jonge, *Christology in Context* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 172; Ben Witherington, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 250-62.

³⁵ Cf. Frank J. Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus: Composition and Theology in Mark 15* (SBLDS 66; Chicago: Scholars Press, 1982).

³⁰ H. C. Kee, *Community of the New Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 135.

³¹ L. Goppelt, "βαπτίζω," *TDNT* 6.149-53.

where it appears in the context of divine confrontation with worldly rulers (6.14, 22, 25, 26, 27; 13.9). Conversely, in chap. 15 the word is employed six times, but exclusively of Jesus (w. 2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32). Barnett argues that Mark has deliberately used the word βασιλεὺς ("king") throughout the passion because it is so close in sound to βασιλεία ("kingdom"). The connection is that "Mark wants us to understand that, incredible as it may seem, 'the kingdom of God' actually begins with the crucifixion of 'the king of Israel.'"³⁶

The confession of Jesus as υἱὸς θεοῦ ("Son of God") by the centurion is the climax of Mark's Christology and points to Jesus' kingship.³⁷ The title conveys the regal nature of Jesus' identity as "Son of God" and is used to denote royalty in both the OT and GrecoRoman literature.³⁸ Achtemeier argues that the confession links back to vv. 26, 32 to indicate that suffering defines Jesus' kingship.³⁹ Furthermore, at Jesus' baptism the heavenly voice declares him to be the Son of God (1.9-11),

is a quotation from Isa 42.1, and pertains to the Isaianic Suffering Servant. As sonship engenders a commission, it is likely that Jesus' sonship entails going to the cross. In the transfiguration (9.11-13) the announcement of divine sonship is flanked by sayings of the necessity of the cross. The Parable of the Tenants (12.6) characterizes the son as being rejected and murdered. Additionally, it is only at the cross that Jesus' sonship is properly recognized and acclaimed. The connection of divine sonship/kingship with the Messianic mission of redemption is then well established.

³⁶ Paul Barnett, "Mark: Story and History," in *In the Fullness of Time: Biblical Studies in Honour of Archbishop Donald Robinson* (ed. David Petersen and John Pryor; Homebush West, NSW: Lancer, 1992), 34.

³⁷ I would go so far as to say that it relates to 1.1 and functions as a Christological inclusio (cf Taylor, *Mark*, 597). See for discussion Earl S. Johnson Jr., "Is Mark 15.39 the key to Mark's Christology?" *JSNT* 31 (1987): 3-22; J. D. Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 128-34.

³⁸ 2 Sam 7.14; Pss 2.7; 89.26-27; cf. 4QFlor 1.10-14; 1 Qsa 2.11-12; 4Q246 2.1; Wis 9.7; Sib. Or. 3.702; 4 Ezra 5.28; Jub. 1.25 ff. For Greco-Roman literature see L. R. Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperors* (New York: Arno, 1975), 591-80.

³⁹ Achtemeier, *Mark*, 61-62.

The kingship of Jesus is also manifested in the titular inscription. Here Mark's narrative craft demonstrates the tragic irony that surrounds Jesus' mission. For the title "king of the Jews" stands in ironical relation to the content of Jesus' proclamation: the coming of God's kingship. Jesus, in word and action, proclaimed the kingdom to come, yet what comes is the kingship of the crucified.⁴⁰

Mark's Christology also presents itself using a consistent juxtaposition of Christ / Son of Man which equates to a sharp contrast of kingship and suffering. This is observable in Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi (8.27-31), the transfiguration (9.2-13), the distinction of worldly power and Jesus' diaconal ministry (10.35-45), the Parable of the Tenants (12.1-12), and Jesus' response to Caiaphas (14.61-64). In 15.25-27, 32 we find the pinnacle of Mark's Christological spiral. The titles Son of Man and Messiah are mutually interpretive; it is suffering which defines and expresses Jesus' kingship.

5

The Day of the Lord imagery also implies that the kingdom is manifest. The sudden coming of darkness elicits images of Yahweh's wrath and judgment being poured out (Exod 10.21; Jer 15.9; Amos 8.9). This judgment encompasses humankind in general (v. 33) and Judaism in particular (v. 38).⁴¹ The tearing of the temple veil announces both the triumph of the eschatological king and the declaration of judgment upon an apostate institution.⁴² Jesus has performed the role of the Passover lamb and given his life for many (cf 14.22-25) and thus performs the saving actions of his kingship. The images of salvation and judgment

⁴⁰ M. Eugene Boring, "The Kingdom of God in Mark," in *The Kingdom of God in 20th Century Interpretation* (ed. Wendell Willis; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 144.

⁴¹ Brower, "Seeing the Kingdom in Power," 38.

⁴² Christopher Rowland, "Christ in the New Testament," in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. John Day; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 480.

imply only one thing: the kingdom has arrived; in the crucifixion of Jesus, God is at last king.

III. The Cross as Power in Powerlessness

Even if we regard the cross as a visible expression of the kingdom of God, in what way can the crucifixion possibly be construed to mean the “kingdom coming in power”? Significantly, in the NT Jesus’ death is regarded as a cosmic victory (cf 1 Cor 1.18,24; Eph 4.8; Col 2.15), and beneath the lurid description of Jesus’ death we uncover a similar theme in Mark. For Jesus is portrayed as a figure of superlative personal power. The various healings, miracles, exorcisms, predictive prophecy, and Jesus’ intellectual superiority over his opponents make it incredibly startling that he should end up on a Roman cross if he is the Messiah. This is perhaps the very question the Markan community was asking. Mark’s solution is not to correct a theology of glory with a theology of suffering, nor to refute a “divine man” Christology,⁴³ but rather, he makes it evident that the cross is a fate that Jesus freely embraced. The powerful one of his own accord became powerless for the sake of others (cf John 10.11-18; 2 Cor 8.6; Phil 2.5-11).

This motif is implied in 8.31–9.1 where Jesus declares that his crucifixion, the acme of powerlessness and oppression, is divinely appointed and is essential to the Messianic mission. Jesus arrives in Jerusalem with the explicit intention of dying and is welcomed amid shouts of triumph as the messianic deliverer (11.10).⁴⁴ “In other words, Jesus’ coming to Jerusalem, his coming to face powerlessness and death is, in the same act, the triumphant coming of

God’s kingdom.”⁴⁵ It is during an unfair trial, amidst rejection, denial, renunciation, humiliation, and physical and verbal abuse, that Jesus makes his audacious declaration of sovereign power (14.62).

Moreover, crucifixion was an evocative symbol of Roman power that declared the sovereignty of Caesar over the world. Yet Jesus submits to it with a view to establishing once for all the kingdom of God. The crucifixion that expresses the zenith of disempowerment, degradation, and death becomes the vehicle for the expression of the kingdom’s salvific power. It is by renouncing power to save oneself that the power to save others is unleashed with formidable force. This is intimated in the ransom logion (10.45) and reaches its stunning climax in 15.31-32 where the high priest and scribes mock Jesus because he is not “powerful” enough (οὐ δύνάτα) to save himself, and therefore, not a king (βασιλεὺς). However, the same power that pillaged the demonic realm (cf 1.24; 3.11; 5.7) is now displayed in the apex of human weakness and suffering.⁴⁶ In a momentous irony it is in Jesus’ outright refusal to save himself with an awesome display of heavenly power that will implement the salvation of others by ransoming them from their sins. It is also this very salvation that proves that Jesus is king (cf Isa 33.22).

6

The loud cry of Jesus (φωνὴν μεγάλην) in 15.37 expresses the apocalyptic interest of Mark as it is an exclamation of divine victory over evil. “In the triumphant cry of Jesus, good, reversing its plunge toward apparent defeat, emerges victorious from the cosmic battle, and seals the final judgment and ultimate destruction of evil.”⁴⁷ As Waetjen writes,

⁴³ Pace Theodore J. Weeden, “The Cross as Power in Weakness (Mark 15.20b-41),” in *The Passion in Mark: Studies in Mark 14-16* (ed. Werner H. Kelber; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 115-34.

⁴⁴ Dorothy A. Lee-Pollard, “Powerlessness as Power: A Key Emphasis in the Gospel of Mark,” *SJT* 40 (1987): 185-86.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁴⁶ Barnett, *Servant King*, 173.

⁴⁷ Weeden, “The Cross as Power,” 130.

“He has fulfilled his mission. He has used his power as the New Human Being [Son of Man] on behalf of others. At the end he does not merely suffer death; he freely enters into it.”⁴⁸

IV. Literary Context of 8.31–9.13

Brower correctly states, “The full significance of Mark’s contextualization of 9.1 has only rarely been appreciated.”⁴⁹ Specifically this means that we need to inquire as to whether the content of 8.31–9.1 and 9.1–13 corresponds with the above statements about the relationship between the kingdom and crucifixion in Mark’s gospel. Mark 8.31–9.1 is universally regarded as commencing the second major division of Mark’s gospel but is still umbilically connected to the Caesarea Philippi pericope (8.27–30) as it functions to explicate the nature of Jesus’ messiahship. Jesus explains that his messiahship is to be revealed in suffering and death. Peter’s rebuke of Jesus is actually a temptation for Jesus to establish the kingdom without going to the cross. Jesus responds with a counter-rebuke to Peter, issues a summons to the crowd, pronounces a stern warning about the necessity of cross-carrying for discipleship, and finishes with a promise about the coming of the Son of Man and kingdom of God (8.38–9.1). The scene then changes as the narrative progresses into the transfiguration story (9.2–13).

Mark 8.38 and 9.1 are connected by the conceptual idea of “coming” and form an antithesis of warning and promise.⁵⁰ The theme once more is the mystery of the kingdom and its relationship to the Messiah. Consequently, Mark’s theology of the kingdom is supremely Christocentric so that the kingdom of God and the person of Jesus are integrally connected

so as to be inseparable (cf Mark 1.14–15; 4.11).⁵¹ For the Son of Man is inexplicably connected to the coming of the kingdom: specifically, it is his suffering which is to inaugurate it.⁵² This point is affirmed in 8.31–38 as Jesus ardently insists on nothing other than a Son of Man who inaugurates the kingdom through his mission of redemptive suffering which his disciples are called to participate in. Those who forsake the cross risk facing the eschatological judgment. But after this grave warning comes the great promise in 9.1; for to those who remain loyal in the long death march to the cross, in the midst of the humiliations and death of the Son of Man they shall see the kingdom of God come with power.

In 9.1–13 the transfiguration should not be regarded as being the fulfillment of 9.1, for this would imply that Mark failed to notice the absurdity of implying that some would not die until they see the kingdom of God come with power when the event was less than a week away.⁵³ The episode is partly a preview of the Parousia, but predominantly it serves to vindicate Jesus’ teachings concerning the Son of Man. The transfiguration highlights that Jesus is the Son of God who must be heard.⁵⁴ The climax of the episode is the divine voice, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” What the disciples are exhorted to listen to is what Jesus has already said immediately before and after the transfiguration, viz., the necessity of the sufferings of the Son of Man for the coming of the kingdom (8.31–37; 9.11–13).⁵⁵ For whenever Jesus talks about a suffering Son of Man he is met by opposition, confusion, rejection, and even disbelief. To overcome this ob-

⁴⁸ Waetjen, “A Re-ordering of Power,” 327.

⁴⁹ Brower, “Seeing the Kingdom in Power,” 32.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵¹ Lane, *Mark*, 313.

⁵² W. R. Telford, *Mark* (NTG; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 133.

⁵³ C. K. Barrett, *Jesus and the Gospel Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1967), 85.

⁵⁴ Gundry, *Mark*, 468 f.

⁵⁵ Cf. Brower, “Seeing the Kingdom in Power,” 35.

stale a mark of divine authenticity is given by the Father (9.7). This divine imprimatur provides the divine sanction of Jesus' mission and dismisses any misunderstandings that it is the morbid preoccupation of a rabbi obsessed with his own self-destruction. The transfiguration proves that the cross is intrinsic to the divine plan— it is of God. Indeed, perhaps such a stark reluctance to embrace the necessity of the cross was a hallmark of the Markan community. The transfiguration story then demonstrates that the path to glory starts with suffering.⁵⁶

7

V. The Promises of 9.1 and the Crucifixion

To argue that the crucifixion is the fulfillment of 9.1 runs into a major obstacle as no proponent of the theory has explained exactly how the specific promises of the logion correlate to the events depicted in 15.25-39. This should cause serious doubt about the hypothesis unless it can be demonstrated how the promises of "some," "standing here" and "not taste death" relate to Jesus' execution.

Various proposals have been offered regarding the promise that some of the bystanders will not taste death before they see the kingdom coming. Cranfield argues:

I would assume that the point of the solemn language about not tasting death is that the persons referred to would have the privilege of seeing in the course of their natural life what others would see only at the final judgment.⁵⁷

Yet "taste death" denotes a violent and bloody fate rather than an acquiescent fading into mortality. This is reinforced by the threat of

martyrdom in 8.31-38 particularly given the idea of cross bearing.

Another suggestion is that of Bruce Chilton who thinks it refers to Moses and Elijah in the transcendence of death at the transfiguration. Yet the immortality of the two is not even implied in the episode and neither is their immortality an emphasis of Jewish tradition.⁵⁸

Brower argues that the phrase expresses a dual function of threat/promise by referring to those who will not escape the judgment of the Son of Man at the cross and the disciples who participate in the kingdom through cross-bearing afterwards.⁵⁹ However, there is little reason to believe that "taste death" can be in any way associated with the deliverance from divine judgment. The promise of not experiencing death is also centered on the events prior to the kingdom of God coming rather than subsequent to its manifestation. The promise is, after all, that some of Jesus' audiences will not perish before the power of the kingdom is revealed.

Alternatively we may propose that if the meaning is located in the events leading up to and including the crucifixion it makes perfect sense. Indeed, not only the disciples but anyone associated with Jesus during the triumphal entry, cleansing of the temple, confrontation with the Jewish leadership, and his arrest would put themselves in serious jeopardy. Such a martyrdom is conceivable given the political climate of Jerusalem during the Passover where the officials, Roman and Jewish, would be quick to quash any radical movement with messianic claims that could poten-

⁵⁶ Achtemeier, *Mark*, 102.

⁵⁷ C. E. B. Cranfield, "Thoughts on New Testament Eschatology," *SJT* 35 (1982): 503; cf. Gundry, *Mark*, 468 f.

⁵⁸ Bruce Chilton, *God in Strength* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), 268 f.; Gundry, *Mark*, 468 f.

⁵⁹ Brower, "Seeing the Kingdom in Power," 39.

tially destabilize the city amidst the arrival of the swelling crowds.⁶⁰

The limitation of the number who can expect to witness this event is not all the disciples except Judas. Nor does it refer to a date late in the 1st century when most of the disciples (or even Mark's community) have died. The challenge is issued to the whole crowd and not merely the disciples (cf 8.34: ὄχλος ["the crowd"]). Interestingly 15.40 records that some of Jesus' female followers were present to observe the crucifixion, and there are good reasons for supposing that the promise is fulfilled in them: (1) these women have seen both the death and the report of the resurrection of the Son of Man (cf 8.31) which are adequate vehicles for the kingdom's manifestation; (2) noting that γυναῖκες ("women") may be a feminine parallel of τινες ("some", 9.1) it is possible that this parallelism is intentional (cf NIV, GNB, TEV "Some women"); (3) in 15.41 it is deliberately and superfluously reported that these women were with Jesus in Galilee which encompasses Caesarea Philippi where the 9.1 was uttered— they were arguably part of the crowd to whom the promise was given; and (4) women occupy a prime place in Mark's narrative and normatively represent positive examples of faith and discipleship (cf 1.16-20; 2.13f.; 3.13-19; 4.4-20; 7.17-23; 12.42-44; 14.28; 16.7).

8

Mark 9.1 also emphasizes that the onlookers will see (9.1) the kingdom of God. The juxtaposition of ἴδωσιν ("seeing") with οὐ μὴ γεύσωνται θανάτου ("not taste death") highlights the fact that this action of seeing is in a physical sense and comprises a historical reference rather than a visionary experience.⁶¹ In

15.40 the continuous tense of the participle θεωροῦσαι ['watching'] stresses this visual aspect exactly. The verb θεωρέω ("I see") has a slightly different nuance from other seeing verbs (e.g., ὁράω) as it conveys the sense of being a spectator to a specific event.⁶²

In this interpretation Mark 15.39-41 resonates with the events of 9.1. We have a limited number of observers (some) who were with Jesus in Caesarea-Philippi (standing here) who have recently faced the possibility of martyrdom (not taste death) and see the Son of Man crucified (kingdom of God coming in power).

VI. Conclusion

It is therefore tenable that Mark regarded the crucifixion as the kingdom of God coming in power. Mark's kingdom theology directs us unequivocally to the cross as the central symbol of its arrival. From the ambiguous heralding of 1.14-15 to the statement of theophanic glory in 14.62, Mark progressively presents us with more pieces of the puzzle about the kingdom until the crucifixion itself unveils before us its most vivid reality. The nature of Jesus' death is portrayed in such a way that it may appropriately be called power in powerlessness. This is largely confirmed by the literary context of 8.28-9.13 which reinforces the necessity of the cross for the inauguration of the kingdom and vindicates Jesus' predictions about his passion. Additionally, the specific details of 9.1 (some, taste death, seeing) are fulfilled in the women who observe the crucifixion. However, we should not be dogmatic and demand that the meaning of Mark 9.1 is thereby exhausted in the crucifixion.⁶³ Jesus' ministry, the resurrection, Pentecost, and the

⁶⁰ For an account of a riot that arose in Jerusalem during Passover see Josephus, *The War of the Jews*, 2.12.1.

⁶¹ France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 140.

⁶² M. Volkel, "[...]" *EDNT* 2.147; W. Michaelis, "[...]" *TDNT* 5.318.

⁶³ Brower, "Seeing the Kingdom in Power," 40. Cf. Alan R. Cole, *Mark* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 208-9 who identifies 9.1 with Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

Parousia are all events that in their own way constitute a manifestation of the kingdom, and powerfully so. Thus in many ways we arrive at a conclusion not too dissimilar from R. T. France's proposal that the kingdom arrives in multiple actions with, however, the distinction that the cross represents the *coup de main* of the kingdom's arrival and constitutes the fullest expression of its presence, goal, and reality.

This conclusion, if correct, should be significant for Markan studies. The hypothesis highlights the absolute centrality of the cross in Mark's gospel. Mark is making a profound statement about the divine necessity of the cross in the ministry of Jesus as it constitutes the very axis upon which the kingdom hinges. In a cultural world where crucifixion would have been looked upon with degradation and shame,⁶⁴ Mark invites his readers to not only accept the cross despite reservations, but also to embrace it as a paradigmatic model of Christian living. Hence, Gundry is correct to see Mark's gospel as fundamentally an apology for the cross.⁶⁵ By the same token the relevance of this proposal also impacts readings of Mark's eschatology. Mark as "apocalyptic" has become a vogue position in the last twenty years.⁶⁶ This is true in so far as it explains the cosmic plot of Mark's gospel which commences and concludes with tearings of the heavens.⁶⁷ The story unravels the unfolding drama of God's triumph through Christ over evil. For the anticipated power of the age to

come has come, but in midst of apparent weakness. Yet, paradoxically, it remains the climax of divine power as it effects the salvation of the elect and the condemnation of the wicked. Concurrently this salvation is incomplete and awaits consummation. Thus the cross also foreshadows the materialization of this salvation and judgment which will eventuate when the Son of Man returns, not in veiled power, but in visible power. Perhaps this explains why language so indicative of the Parousia is used to describe the crucifixion in 9.1. Though the crucifixion is the antithesis of human power, it calls attention to the final elimination of evil at the return of the Son of Man.

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⁶⁴ Cf. Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (London; SCM, 1970).

⁶⁵ Gundry, Mark, 1022-25; cf. S. G. F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1967), 221-82.

⁶⁶ Cf. Kee, *Community of the New Age*, 64-76; Burton L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 325-31; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and The People of God* (Fortress: Minneapolis, 1992), 391-96.

⁶⁷ Mark 1.10; cf. 15.38 where the curtain of the Temple was a tapestry of the heavens and the earth (David Ulansey, "The Heavenly Veil Torn: Mark's Cosmic Inclusio," *JBL* 110 [1991]: 123-25).