

Preacher: Darren Clarke (Jacksdale)

CONDITIONS OF SPIRITUAL POWER

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: Mark 9:14-29.

People make mistakes when they try to understand verse 29. They think that they can ‘name it and claim it’, that God is there to be commanded by us to do the things we want. We have spiritual power given to us by Christ and we are involved in a spiritual battle with principalities and powers. We need spiritual power in this battle because we cannot fight this battle on our own. In Jacksdale the church is about to embark on leafleting and visiting the whole community. But they are not doing it without first a week of prayer and fasting.

We might wonder what it means when the Lord says that ‘This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.’ Does it mean that God is not willing to do anything unless we pray in a particular way? Or that these kinds of demons are more powerful than God? Or that God will not do anything unless we specifically pray? We cannot believe any of these things. God is powerful and sovereign. So what is this saying to us? It is best thought of as a lesson about faith. It is about what prayer and fasting will do for us. It is not about us getting God ‘into an arm lock’ and forcing Him to do something for us.

In v 19, is Jesus angry with His disciples? Really these words are said to everyone – to the Pharisees, to the crowd, to the father and to the disciples. He was speaking to them all about their lack of faith in Him. They had seen His miracles and heard His teaching yet lacked faith, lacked belief. This is a problem to this day. It is unbelief. It is a lack of trust in God’s ability, a lack of confidence in Him. We know that we are weak, but we desire to increase in strength. So this is about a lack of faith in Christ and in His ability.

1. Human limitations.

We learn about our inabilities. The Lord told us that without Him we can do nothing. We are totally dependent on Him for everything. We are dead as sinners and depend on God for life. The disciples had cast out demons before when they had been sent out by the Lord earlier, two by two. They had authority given to them by the Lord Himself. But now they were doing things in their own strength. We have to look at our inabilities and this will then send us back to Christ. This is the way that we are then able to grow.

2. The depth of the problem.

We can see this in vv21-22. The child had perhaps been like this since a baby. Nothing could be done for him. This is how we might feel about this generation. They get worse by the week. Man follows his own rules and opposes God. What do we feel? Despair? Sadness? Fear? We are not shielded from the problems of life because we are Christians. But we are to meet them with faith. J.C. Ryle, commenting on this passage, tells us 'Never despair!'. We have a rock, an anchor, a promise in Christ Jesus.

3. The problem of unbelief.

In the account in Matthew 17:20, we see the problem was their unbelief, their lack of faith. We are a fickle people. Troubles come upon us, and faith goes out the window. We fall into self-pity and a lack of belief that God can do anything. We ask of our churches, 'Can this place be filled?' Has God finished saving people? The answer is 'No'. There is still salvation available to people. We are still here to pray and preach! However bleak things might look, salvation is still there for those who look to the Lord. We should have belief in God in all circumstances. Unbelief leads to defeat. Faith leads to success in the spiritual battle. Faith is about our hope, our assurance, our attitude. It is about faith in Christ. The more we have, the more of Christ we see, the more we love Him. Our circumstances then move to one side.

All the promises in His word are available to us. We see this in John 14: 12-13. All that God says is available today is open to us. Everything that God speaks to us about in His word is available.

4. What about prayer and fasting?

We should look at James 5: 16-18. Elijah was a man with the same doubts and struggles as us. If we know God, we will know that He will give us what He promised. But we must pray. We see people praying in Joel 1:14, 2: 2-13, It is there in Psalm 35:13. In Matthew 9:15 we have the bridegroom who is waiting for us. We must engage in prayer and fasting. Fasting is not just about foregoing food. It is a desire to spend time with God and desire is the key here. Do we have that desire? Do we really want to get close to God? Do we really want to share our hearts with Him and know Him? We should go to Him with assurance and certainty. We need a deep relationship with Him. We want to have the relationship with Him which is at maximum depth.

Our trouble is often that we lose sight of who we are in Christ. We need to know Him in these hard days we live in. We need to seek Him with all we have.