

Satan vs Jesus

Following Jesus to the Cross: Part 4

Mark 9:14-29 (Mt.17:14-23, Lk.9:37-45) 8/5/2019

If you are a Christian, you probably don't have the kind of unbelief the boy's father had—doubting Jesus' power. But very often we have the kind of unbelief the disciples had, which is what really exasperated Jesus. This message will show you how to detect that kind of unbelief in your heart and overcome it.

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Mark 9:14 When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. **15** As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. **16** "What are you arguing with them about?" he asked. **17** A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. **18** Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not." **19** "O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

20 So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion.¹ He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. **21** Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. **22** "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." **23** "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." **24** Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." **26** The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." **27** But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

28 After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" **29** He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."

¹ This is the last time we see Jesus encountering a demon in Mark.

Satan Hates You

The way Jesus drags this out, you get the sense that he's drawing our attention to how evil this demon really is. When the demon attacks the boy after seeing Jesus, you expect Jesus to drive the demon out right away like he usually does. But instead he asks a question. The boy is writing around on the ground, foaming at the mouth, gnashing his teeth, and ... **21 Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"** What does that matter? Is there a statute of limitations on driving out demons? Does Jesus need this information to be able to drive the demon out? No. For one thing, Jesus just cares about this man's plight. It may not matter to us how long it had been going on, but I guarantee it mattered to that father. And to that boy. And so it mattered to Jesus. Jesus gives this man a chance to describe how severe his trial had been. But I think the main purpose here is for us to know how bad the situation really was. So Jesus asks the question, and the answer he gets is bone-chilling.

21 ... "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered.

The boy is a child, so I take this to mean "from infancy." Can you imagine? I remember how heartbroken we all were when we got the news that little Abbie had cystic fibrosis. Can you imagine having a baby and eventually you realize, this child is deaf? Then you realize he is also mute. Then you find out he has a demon. And not just any demon—this is a demon that's far more powerful than other demons, and vicious and cruel beyond comprehension. Can you imagine anyone whipping a little child around like a dog with a rag doll? That's how evil Satan is.

22 "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him."

Nikki's whole life has been consumed with feeding and caring for little Abbie—making sure she gets all the medicine and treatments she needs. Can you imagine if your whole life was consumed with just rescuing your child from efforts to kill him? Constantly wrapping the horrible burns on his little arms and legs and chest and back from when the demon threw him into fires? Pulling him out of water and reviving him.

And remember, this is not a disease doing this; it's a spirit—a sentient being doing this on purpose. How evil do you have to be to do that to a child? An infant! This demon is so vicious. Did you notice how Mark keeps giving descriptions of what the demon does?

18 Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid.

20 When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

26 The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead."

Mark won't let us turn our face away. He really wants us to see how evil evil is. We need that because you and I are constantly tempted to give ourselves over to the will of beings like this. Whenever we are tempted to sin, we need to think of passages like this and realize who it is who is whispering in our ear. Satan hates you. He is a roaring lion with one goal in mind for you: devouring. He would love to do the same thing to you that he did to this kid. He is a mad dog, and every time he offers you some pleasure or satisfaction, every time he offers you safety if you just lie a little bit, every time he offers you satisfaction if you hold that grudge or engage in that immorality—it's never because he wants you to be happy. It's always because he wants to get his teeth in deep so he can whip you side to side and slam your head on the ground like a dog on a rag doll. We are never more insane than when we give him a place in our lives.

The Goodness of Christ

Contrast that with Jesus. The man uses a dramatic word when he asks Jesus for help.

22 "...if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

That word **help** is a rare word that means to run to someone's aid. Someone is in trouble and you run to rescue him. It's a word that has an urgent feel to it. He also asks that Jesus would act out of **pity**. The idea is for Jesus to empathize and feel how miserable this man and his family are and act out of that feeling. That's what he asks for, and that's what he gets.

25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." 26 The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

The terminology Mark uses here is the lingo of resurrection—so much so that some commentators even believe the boy did die and Jesus raised him.² I don't buy that. If he was dead, he wouldn't say he looked like a corpse; he's just say "he was dead." But I do think there is a purpose behind using resurrection language. It's to make the point of full restoration. I'm convinced this boy was completely delivered, the demon gone, the deafness, muteness, brain damage, injuries—fully restored. It might as well have been a resurrection because Jesus gave this boy a whole new life.

Jesus is the opposite of everything that is evil about this demon. I made the point in a previous podcast that we can't stay on the mountaintop. This life takes place in the valley. But when they bring the boy to Jesus, what happens? Some of the glory of the mountaintop is brought into the valley, isn't it? Bringing a problem to Jesus in prayer has the effect of reaching forward into eternal glory and bringing a measure of the glorious kingdom right into our fallen, broken, darkness.

The Power of Christ

So that's a glimpse at the love and grace of Jesus, but the greater emphasis in the passage is on the power of Christ. So that's the ugliness of the demon, now let's look at the power of Christ. The Emphasis in v.25 is on the word "I."

Jesus Doesn't Need Our Faith

25 ... Jesus rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I—I myself command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

It's not my disciples this time. It's me, so you don't have the option of disobeying. They don't have authority over you. But I do, and I'm commanding you right now—get lost, and don't ever come back." This is the only time Jesus adds the part about never entering him again. You have to wonder if this demon got a double-barreled rebuke because Jesus was angry about what he just did when he saw Jesus—mauling this little boy right in front of Jesus.

26 The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out.

26 ... The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead."

27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

Even in the face of all this unbelief, Jesus has no problem driving this demon out and completely restoring this boy. The outline of this passage is:

- I. The disciples fail because of unbelief
- II. The father exhibits his unbelief

² "he raised him" (*egeiren*), and "he was raised" (*aneste*).

III. Jesus casts out the demon effortlessly

When people try to say that Jesus is somehow hogtied by our lack of faith, they need to study passages like this. Jesus requires us to believe, but he is not empowered in any way by our believing, nor is he stripped of any power by our unbelief.

Deity

The question of “How long shall I put up with this current generation?” is a concept seen several times in the OT, and it’s always God speaking. I would never say something like that because I’m a part of my generation. I was born at the beginning of my generation, and if I live long enough I’ll die at the end of my generation. Only God looks across all the generations and makes a judgment about one of them compared to others. There’s no question that Jesus is portrayed in the gospels as a visitor on earth from heaven, not just a normal, natural human being.

Jesus Didn’t Need to Pray

And here’s something for you to think about: How do you think it hit the disciples when Jesus said, “This kind can come out only by prayer,” then when he drove the demon out, he didn’t pray? Mark isn’t hesitant to tell us about instances when Jesus prays elsewhere in the book. If it happened here and it were relevant for us to know, Mark would tell us. So from what we can tell, Jesus doesn’t appeal to God the Father, he doesn’t call upon the power of the Holy Spirit; he simply commands the demon on his own authority and the demon goes. How do we explain that? Saying, “**This kind can come out only by prayer,**” is another way of saying, “This is a demon that only God can drive out. The only way to do it is by praying to God—unless you happen to be God. Driving out this kind of demon is like stilling a storm or walking on water, the only person who can do it without praying is Jesus.”³

Or to look at it another way, if this kind of demon can only come out by prayer, and in this case it came out by the boy’s father asking Jesus to drive it out, what does that tell us? That asking Jesus to do something = praying. Which means Jesus is whom? God.

Judging Jesus by the Weakness of His Followers

One final point: if Jesus had this much power, and had proved that power so many times, why does this man doubt his ability? Why doesn’t he just ask Jesus for help? Why throw in the words, “**if you can, take pity on us and help us**”? Well, think about what had just happened. All nine of the disciples who were there had tried and failed to drive out the demon. That never happened. They were famous for having power over demons. The disciples had even raised the dead. They had never met a demon they didn’t drive out. And yet every one of them fails to drive this one out. What does that tell this man? It’s an impossible situation. His boy is incurable even by the greatest miracle workers Israel had ever seen, which is saying something. So after that, he doesn’t have much hope left. He doubts Jesus can even do it. That’s why he says, **if you can**.

This man makes the classic mistake of imposing the failure of Christ’s people on Christ. This is very common—people judge Jesus by the weakness of his followers. He started out believing Jesus could help—that’s why he came. But when the disciples couldn’t do it, his faith almost died. “If you can do anything”—that’s not faith. You could say that to a lamp post.

This is very common. People lose faith in God because of failures of God’s people. People in the church failed me, gossiped about me, lied to me, ignored me, hurt me; and now I’m doubting God. It’s had a negative impact on my faith—that happens all the time. Or people learn God’s Word over the years

³ It is often preached that Jesus had to depend on the Holy Spirit in the same way we do. There is some truth in that, but for the most part it is incorrect. Jesus performed miracles at will.

by some preacher, then that preacher falls into sin or some major failure, and so they start doubting everything they learned from that preacher. We confuse the message and the messenger. And we confuse God's people with God. The failures of God's people do not reflect in any way on God, and to assume they do is the height of folly. And this passage shows that. The disciples' effort was a complete failure and Jesus' effort was an effortless success.

So don't ever make the irrational mistake of allowing the failures of God's people to diminish your faith in God or his Word.

But on the other hand, keep in mind that people will make this irrational mistake, so it's important that we do all we can to avoid this kind of ministry failure. We probably have no idea how much damage is done by our ministry failures. They really can destroy people's faith. So it's crucial that we learn the lesson that Jesus teaches the disciples here so we don't repeat their failure. But before we get to that, let's see what Jesus says to this man.

22 ... "if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." 23 " 'If you can'?" said Jesus.

25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

Summary

Unbelief has a thousand faces. The scribes refused to believe, the crowds stopped at amazement but never followed Jesus, and the boy's father doubted Jesus' power. But the disciples' form of unbelief, which is the one that was especially exasperating to Jesus, was a form of self-reliance. They had been given authority over demons, so they became self-dependent in that area. So when they encountered a demon they couldn't drive out, they didn't trust God in prayer. We do the same in those areas where we normally have ability to do something at will.