

Mark 9:14-29

¹⁴ And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them. ¹⁵ Immediately, when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running to *Him*, greeted Him. ¹⁶ And He asked the scribes, "What are you discussing with them?" ¹⁷ Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. ¹⁸ And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not." ¹⁹ He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me." ²⁰ Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. ²¹ So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. ²² And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." ²³ Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things *are* possible to him who believes." ²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" ²⁵ When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!" ²⁶ Then *the spirit* cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, "He is dead." ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. ²⁸ And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁹ So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."

As always, this morning, we need to remember our setting. Peter, James, John and Jesus had just come from the mountain top. It may have been 9000 feet in elevation. They had come from God displaying His Glory. It was a situation of heaven on earth. There was glorious fellowship. There were experts of faith. Christ was fellowshiping with saints who probably could actually encourage Him. The disciples had witnessed first hand and experienced the Kingdom of God in power as Christ had predicted in the previous text.

Naturally Peter had blurted out something silly and inappropriate. But Christ didn't have much to say about it. Except He told the disciples emphatically not to tell anyone. When Moses had come down from the mountain, he continued to glow afterward. The fact that Christ wanted to keep this event a secret probably tells us that there were no obvious symptoms remaining.

So now they come down from the mountain. They come down from a holy experience. They come down to normal life on this planet. And it is not going to be pleasant.

We can't miss the point here that a Christian life, properly lived, does not mean maintaining the continual bliss and blessing of a life un-intruded by evil. God gives us those blessed life experiences, those spiritual high points from time to time. Maybe someone tells us how much our ministry has meant to them. Maybe our kids tell us how grateful they are for our treatment of them. Maybe we spend time with likeminded people and are just deeply blessed by their fellowship. Maybe we go somewhere and have a time devoted to receiving good teaching. Those are all high points. They are wonderful. They are blissful. But the truth is, we have always got to go back to the valley where the **work** is. We must go to the valley where the **need** is. We need to go to the valley where the **struggle** is. That is God's will for our lives.

So let's see what was happening back at the ranch when Christ and Peter, James and John return.

¹⁴ And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them. ¹⁵ Immediately, when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running to Him, greeted Him.

This hike back down the mountain probably took a while. We sometimes forget how rugged these guys had to be. They only mention of Jesus ever riding on anything was the donkey he rode into Jerusalem. Every other mile he covered was either by foot or by boat. These guys would have been in good shape. We can just imagine how the disciples felt when they saw the setting they were walking into. It would be something like a housewife coming home to a house that is a wreck. Or a husband viewing water coming through the ceiling. They were quickly back to real life.

The crowds were back. The scribes were back. And the scribes were attacking the disciples. They were exploiting the opportunity of Christ being away from His disciples. Christ was more than a match for the duplicitous scribes. The disciples were not. We can safely assume that the disciples were not holding up well under the scribe's dispute.

Now, as Christ gets close enough that the crowd can make out who He is, the people were amazed and ran toward Him greeting Him. Why were they amazed? Well, after they had experienced the B team and their failure, Christ may have had a much greater appeal to them. If you have ever waited to see a famous person, when that person arrives there is always some awe and amazement. It doesn't mean much. But it is interesting to watch.

Some scholars say that they were amazed because Christ pretty much emanated authority. That is probably true as well. And you can rest assured all the group

dynamics shifted when Christ showed up. The scribes would no longer be able to have free reign at pestering the disciples.

¹⁶ **And He asked the scribes, "What are you discussing with them?"**

I really like this. It displays how leadership should respond. Elders, Fathers, Mothers, here is an example to follow. Look how Christ puts himself between those intending evil and those being victimized by it. Notice that Christ does not ask the disciples what is going on. He serves notice immediately to the scribes that they will now have to contend with Christ. They will no longer have the easy pickings they had when Christ was away. He goes boldly up to them and seeks to expose what they are doing.

And notice their response. Ummmmm. They say nothing.

¹⁷ **Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. ¹⁸ And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not."**

My guess is this man waited for a while, and then seeing that the scribes were not going to answer, this man answered. This might be projection but I would guess he felt that Christ deserved an answer and if no one else will give it, he will.

So He tells Christ the story. Christ didn't need the story. He already knew it. But He wanted the story told.

Here are the facts of the story.

This man had a son. His son had a spirit, a demon, who made his son mute. This demon would not allow this boy to speak. So the boy could not reveal **what he was going through** with this demon tormenting him.

Then on top of this, this demon would, from time to time, cause the boy to seize. It would look like epilepsy to us. The boy would be violently thrown down, would foam at the mouth, his teeth would grind, and he would become stiff. These are all symptoms of a seizure.

We learn later in the text that this demon was trying to destroy the boy. We don't know how this became evident to the father. We don't know how the father had the wisdom to know that this was caused by a demon. The culture tended to view anyone with epilepsy symptoms as being temporarily out of their minds. They did not always assume they were demon possessed. But this man had somehow discerned that what was happening to his boy was demonic.

What a contrast we have from the world Christ had just come from. He had come from the blessed fellowship of heavenly saints. Now he comes down into the throes of Satan's power and influence. He left people who were ministering **to Him**, to minister to people, many of whom will hate Him. He came from those **who knew what Christ was all** about to those who were closest to Him who

would not believe in Him for more than a moment. That, friends, is our world of ministry.

So the man probably came to find Jesus and ask Him to cast out the demon. But only the disciples were available. So he probably figured, what do I have to lose? So he asked the disciples.

But they could not. The wording used here means that they were overpowered and defeated. They failed due to insufficient power.

Now, how can this be? The disciples were given the power to cast out demons by Christ Himself. They had done so on many occasions. What had happened here? Christ makes it very clear what the problem is.

¹⁹ **He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me."**

The problem is faithlessness.

You know, in some ways the disciples had it harder than us. **Faith**, according to **Hebrews 11:1, is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**

Faith looks to that it has not seen yet. The disciples had Christ **with them**. If we had been with Christ what would we have done? We would tend to do what we want to do now. Don't we tend to want **someone else** to carry the load if they seem able to do so? Don't we avoid the hard things, the awkward things, the uncomfortable things if we can do so? Well the disciples were probably just like us. They weren't going to seek **to do more** than they had to, **learn more** than they had to, **sacrifice more** than they had to. So if Christ was willing to do all the healing, all the better.

But there is a problem here. The disciples were not exercising faith. They didn't have to. Everything they were doing was in the presence of Christ. They **could let Him** do it.

We don't have that privilege. If we are Christians, we were drawn by a God that we could not see to a Christ that we cannot see by a Holy Spirit that we cannot see to a kingdom that we cannot see and will receive entry into a heaven that we cannot see. Our salvation is from faith to faith. If we are in it, we are in it by the faith that we have been gifted with from God. So for us, **faith is a necessity**. For the disciples, while Christ was with them, it would have seemed more optional. But Christ knows that they must get beyond this hurdle. They must begin to live by faith. And this current situation is a good teaching ground.

While Christ spoke in broad terms when He said, "O faithless generation", the disciples probably knew Christ was mostly speaking about them. It is they who had just failed the test. And they failed the test for one reason. **They did not**

trust God to do what God had promised. They did not count on God to deliver what He said.

Isn't that us when we fail? Isn't that always the core of the problem? Oh, we always blame it on something else. We say, you don't know how hard this temptation was. You don't know how hard the situation was. You don't know how strong the feeling was. And we go on and on. But ultimately it comes back to the fact that we did not believe **how strong our Savior is**. We did not believe how **worthy our Savior is**. And we did not believe **how good our Savior is**.

Christ goes on- **how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?**

Christ is displaying his passion here. This isn't about facts. He is displaying his frustration with how slow people are to walk by faith, to believe God, to trust God. What Christ is saying here is that his association with these people is not a happy one. There is not much satisfaction in it **for Him**. He is essentially implying that His life would be better and easier without them. They are simply a burden. That is what they would have gotten by Christ's response. His rhetorical questions were displaying his exasperation. It would be like us saying, how long do I have to put up with your nonsense?

Sometimes, when we get the idea that sinning isn't a real big deal because God will always forgive us, we find ourselves in the same position as the disciples. We grieve the Holy Spirit and exasperate the Son's love. We can't maintain that kind of a lifestyle. Our goal is not to merely exist in the presence of our Savior. Our goal is to please Him. We must live to please Him. And that is a huge difference. Then Christ asks the disciples to bring the boy to Him.

²⁰ **Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth.**

²¹ **So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood."** ²² **And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him.**

The demon in this boy knew that he was no longer going to face the faithless powerless disciples. Now he is about to meet power incarnate. And he will soon be shopping for a new home. So the demon does his last act of destruction. Why? Because that is what demons do. They are following their leader. The devil is called the destroyer. He seeks to destroy. And given the opportunity in our lives, **he will destroy as much that is sacred** as he possibly can.

We need to really consider that when we are tempted to do something we know to be wrong, or when we refuse to do something that we know to be right. The devil's plan for us is **to rebel**. Because it is only as we rebel that he can accomplish his goals for our lives.

Look what this demon does to this poor boy. What sheer evil. He does not **have to do this** to this boy. He wants to. He takes pleasure in it.

The devil never ever intends one ounce of goodness toward a believer. Never, ever at any time. Every pleasure he offers you outside of the goodness of what God offers you is only intended for one purpose. It is intended for your harm. Never forget that. As you are watching tv, or surfing the web, or considering your responsibilities, or considering your options, remember this. God's intentions for you are **only good** all the time. The devil's intentions for you are **only for your harm** all the time.

Christ asks, how long has this been happening. Remember, Christ is not asking because He does not know. He is asking, more than likely, to further minister to this man. Don't we all need someone we can talk to about the suffering we have experienced? Even in the sharing of it with someone who loves us we feel some of the burden lifted. Well Christ asks for the story.

The father tells him the extent of this evil. This boy has known nothing else. It is likely that this boy did nothing to cause this to happen. But it happened so that Christ would be glorified at this moment.

I think that this man probably recognized that the real problem was spiritual as he watched the boy's behavior. Why would he go into a convulsion predictably when he was near a fire or near water? And why would he always be thrown toward it, whether it was on his right or his left? A father's heart would spot this malevolent intention. Something is trying to hurt his boy.

Christ now has touched base with this man's suffering. Then the man continues. **But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."**

The word here for help means "to run to the aid of one who cries for help."

This man is begging here for a rescue. He is essentially dialing a spiritual 911. He is desperate. He needs anything that Christ can do for him.

But look how he words it. This is one of the rare times when the person asking appears to believe that Christ **intends to help**, but he is **not sure of his ability** to help.

He says "IF you can do anything". I can just imagine the disciples looking on, shaking their heads, and thinking, "I wouldn't have said that if I were you". And they would have been right. Look what Christ says next.

²³ **Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things *are* possible to him who believes."**

Now this is where the people who know Greek tell us something interesting. The translators probably made a mistake here. They got the words right, but they probably got the punctuation wrong.

The statement "If you can" is probably intended to stand on its own. So what we have coming from Christ is not so much a teaching sentence as a statement of indignation.

Christ would really be conveying... If I can...indeed. He would have been challenging the man for his lack of faith. He would be saying, "If I can? Of course I can. I am the Christ, the Son of God. Of course I can do this small thing. How could you think that I am not able to do such a small thing?"

Then Christ teaches with the next statement.

all things are possible to him who believes.

Now I almost always remind you that when you see the word "all", read it in light of its context. All things **that God is willing to do** are possible to him who believes that He will do them. The all doesn't cover just anything our imagination could come up with.

In this instance the man believes Christ wants to heal His Son but He is not sure He can. Anything **Christ intends to do** is possible if we believe.

Now with this difference that the Greek brings out, the next sentence makes a lot more sense.

²⁴ **Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"**

This man understood that he had been rebuked by Christ. And if he is like us, he was probably afraid that he had blown his son's chances by offending the healer. This man shows amazing love for his son. Nothing is more important to him. He knows that Christ is his only chance. He comes to Christ knowing that the problem he has is one that **only Christ can fix.**

Isn't that how we came to Christ? In fact, that is **the only way** to come to Christ that will receive what one really needs. We come to Him realizing that we are sinners. We cannot fix it. It is a spiritual state we live in. We cannot overcome it. We can't get rid of it or improve it. We come realizing that if He will not help us, we cannot be helped. We come humbly admitting our need, just like this man. So the man replies and cries out in complete dependence with emotional passion. And he says this.

"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

What a comfort this statement is. Doesn't that reflect our prayer toward God this morning? We come to Christ in faith. But we tremble because we know ourselves too well. There is nothing about us that is perfect. Everything is a mix. Our motives are never without some shadow. Our faith is always mixed with some degree of lurking doubt. That is simply the truth about us.

But we can follow this man's example as we cry out to God. Lord, I believe. I know who you are. I know what you are like. I trust that you are good and that you intend me good. But there are so many things I am not sure of. There are so many things that I do not understand. So I stand before you spiritually naked, just as I am and I tell the truth about my condition. I am flawed. I don't **know you** like

I should, **love you** like I should, **trust you** like I should, **believe you** like I should. So please, please, please help this poor sinner.

When we pray like that, we are barking up the right tree. God responds to honest requests of His children for His help. He will answer that prayer.

And think about that. Isn't it good that our Lord is not limited by our imperfect faith? We can be so thankful that Christ did not say, well I am sorry. I can't do this because your faith isn't perfect. Our **imperfect faith** is not a problem when it is placed in our **infinitely faithful God**.

²⁵ **When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!"** ²⁶ **Then *the spirit* cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, "He is dead."**

Well, the crowds are doing what they always do. Jesus is drawing a bigger crowd. And that is not going to serve any of the purposes he has. Christ's ministry at this point is mostly directed toward the disciples. He has got to get them living by faith and He must accomplish it soon. So when Christ sees the crowds, he hurries up and casts the demon out.

It is interesting that He tells the demon to enter him no more. Christ does not tell the demon not to enter anyone else. But he is not allowed to enter this poor boy again. This boy has had all the demons he can stand. The father would have been encouraged by those words. He would know that his son is truly free of this monster.

The demon did his last act of destruction and then left.

Now I have never seen a grand mal seizure but many of you have. I understand it leaves a person completely exhausted. Well evidently this was the effect on this boy. The boy lay, maybe unconscious.

²⁷ **But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.**

Jesus restored the boy to normalcy. That is the end of this miracle.

²⁸ **And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?"** ²⁹ **So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."**

We need to look at Matthew's parallel text here to get the full picture.

Matthew 17:19-21

¹⁹ **Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?"** ²⁰ **So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.** ²¹

However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

The disciples wanted to know what they did wrong. And that is very very good in a disciple. We should all want Christ's evaluation of our lives.

So what was the problem? Did they not say the right words? Did they not do the right things?

Well, two things come out in this text. One is the problem. The other is the symptom.

Christ told them in Matthew that the core problem was that they did not believe. Essentially they were not trusting God to remove the demon.

Christ's rebuke gives us more insight into faith. A little is enough. If we just have a little. Some people have great faith. And that is good. But if we will just use the little we have, it will accomplish great things. Christ uses a mountain as an example so we get the idea of **just how powerful our little faith in a great God is**. If God wants to move a mountain, and we believe it so and act accordingly, the mountain will be moved. The point Christ is making is **not** how we should **move mountains**. It is just how **powerful God is** and how God responds to faith. **Faith avails to us the power of God to accomplish the purposes of God.**

We need to consider this rebuke by Christ. When we know the will of God, yet that will is not being accomplished in our lives, there is only one reason. Faith. We have not trusted God to do what He has said. We have not laid our whole selves into His hands trusting that He will accomplish what He has promised.

Look at the last verse.

²¹ **However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."**

The most reliable texts leave out the words "and fasting". That is helpful in that it makes more sense. Fasting requires time. If fasting is supposed to be included, that would mean that the disciples could not have possibly cast out that demon unless they knew ahead of time that they would have to. They would have had to not eat before the demon-filled child arrived.

But Christ seemed to treat the disciples like they **could have** and **should have** cast out the demon. It seems to me that the disciples simply **did not pray**. They were used to speaking the words and the demon would come out. They may have grown complacent. They may have begun to think that **they carried with them** the power to cast out demons because of their position on the Jesus team. So when the normal things that worked didn't work, they forgot that this is all about God. They had lost their dependency upon God. They were trusting in themselves. Their lack of faith led to a perception that **prayer is not important**, it isn't needed. Everything needing done is in their power to do it. And that is a fatal error.

We should learn from this. Prayer is not something we do to make God do what He has no desire to do. But prayer **is something** where our **faith participates in the purposes of God**. Our faith drives us to ask God what only God can do and to

depend upon Him to do it. The disciples could not cast that demon out. But God could. And God wanted to. This is the perfect place for prayer.

What does God want to accomplish in your world? We might as well recognize right now that we cannot do it. Only God can. But if we will pray for it, we will play a part in it getting done. And our faith does not have to be perfect. God will help our unbelief. We only need **mustard seed faith** in an **unlimited powerful God** to accomplish **miraculous things**. Will we call upon Christ to do what only Christ can do in our lives?