

## WHATSOEVER YOU ASK

Mark 9:14-29

### INTRODUCTION

Today we continue in chapter 9 of Mark, verses 14 to 29.

Jesus had spent the night, according to Luke, on a mountain. He had taken His three closest men, Peter, James and John, up there so that they could see something unique: Jesus, Moses, and Elijah transfigured with the glory of heaven, talking.

Imagine you are walking down the mountain with the four men. They are talking along the way, mostly about what had happened on the mountain, prophecies about Elijah and the Messiah, and similar things. Now the happy travelers turn the last corner till they are back with the other nine apostles and their many friends. As they approach, what do they see?

Let's look.

TEXT: Mark 9:14–29

*14 And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them.*

So much for time thinking of heavenly visions, transfigurations, and prophecies. The conflicts of the current day push in on Jesus and the other three. The scribes, very important men from Jerusalem, are in the middle of a pile of people arguing with the 9 apostles that had been left out of the trip up the mountain. Can't Jesus even get away for 24 hours without these guys making a mess of things?

*15 And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him.*

*16 And he asked them, "**What are you arguing about with them?**"*

Look! It's Jesus! He can settle this argument! Let's run to Him! So they do. Jesus wants to know, "What is this fuss all about?"

*17 And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute.*

*18 And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able."*

So, this is the problem? A man came with a son who was clearly very bad off (he can't talk, he gets thrown on the ground, he grinds his teeth, he gets paralyzed), but instead of finding Jesus, he finds 9 of the apostles, and they try to cast out the demon and cannot. What has this got to do with the scribes? Did they set this up? Did they bring this guy and his son up as a challenge to Jesus? Or were they simply ridiculing the 9, mocking their weakness ("Oh, you don't seem to have all the mighty power of your Master, do you?"). We are not told the details of this, but at its heart, the 9 apostles could handle neither the man's son, nor the scribes, and a whole lot of people stood around watching the commotion.

*19 And he answered them, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.”*

One gets the feeling that Jesus is saying, “Must I handle everything Myself?” The problem? The people are faithless. To whom is He referring? The apostles? Probably. The scribes? Maybe. All the onlookers? Perhaps. He seems to be tossing them all under the chariot with the words, “O faithless generation.”

*20 And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth.*

The demon within the boy “saw” Jesus. The demon’s response? Torment the boy even more. The commotion from the boy thrashing around on the ground was drawing the attention of the crowd even more.

*21 And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood.*

*22 And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”*

*23 And Jesus said to him, “‘If you can’! All things are possible for one who believes.”*

If? If He can help him? The man did not seem to be confident in Jesus’ ability to heal the boy. Why not? Did he always doubt? Was he part of a plot with the scribes to challenge Jesus? Or had the failure of the 9 apostles caused him to disbelieve that Jesus had the power to help? Jesus response was the repeat his unbelief back to him. “If?” Of course, Jesus can help. There is no question of that.

Jesus moves the man’s attention from His ability to heal his son to the man’s faith. If the man believes God, then of course healing is possible. Jesus does not doubt His own power to heal the boy. No need to talk about Jesus’ ability. The question, sir, is “do you trust in God?”

*24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!”*

The man seems to say: “Well if it depends on me, then yes, I believe!” But as he doubted Jesus’ ability to heal, now he doubts his own faith. “Help my unbelief!”

Setting aside the issue of the man’s faith for a moment, Jesus turns His attention to the problem:

*25 And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.”*

What a merciful command. Not only is this spirit to come out, it may never re-enter. This is a freedom for this child that will last him the rest of his life. The demon cannot and will not re-enter him. Why? Because Jesus said so. On the power of Jesus’ word alone, demons are bound. They will, they must, submit to the words of Jesus. Funny, demons have to obey Jesus’ direct

commands. They are powerless to oppose Him. He is the greater force. How great is our Messiah? How great is our Lord?

*26 And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead."*

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

The demon leaves the boy, but not without causing him great distress on the way out. The boy stopped moving. Was he dead? He might have been. He sure looked dead. But Jesus took Him by the hand and lifted him up. This boy had never heard the voice of Jesus. Now he could. Did Jesus speak to him in that moment? When Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead, He had told everyone that she was not dead, only sleeping. They laughed at Him. But no one laughed after He went to her bedside, grabbed her hand and said, "Child, arise." She rose up. Maybe He said the same thing in this case. We do not know. But perhaps the first words the boy heard were: "Child, arise."

*28 And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?"*

*29 And he said to them, "**This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.**"*

The apostles got alone with Jesus and wanted to deal with their own failure. They had been able to cast out demons in the past. Not this one. Why was this one especially difficult? The answer they received is at once obscure and helpful. This kind requires prayer. Prayer is a simple concept. One talks to God. But what kind of prayer? A special wording? Praying out loud, in the moment? Praying before hand? Special prayer preparation? The answer is almost too general. We will come back to this answer in a moment.

## OBSERVATIONS REGARDING THE TEXT

### 1. SATAN IS EVIL, AND EVIL IS MERCILESS

There is a particular viciousness to evil we see displayed in this poor boy. When we see a demon-possessed person in the scripture, we can easily wonder about the sins in the person's past. In Ephesians we read:

*Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. –Ephesians 4:26-27*

This makes sense to us. We have sin within, we do evil things, giving the devil opportunities. So a person who does great evil opens himself up to the forces of darkness. But in this case, we are dealing with a young man. Since childhood he had been tormented by this devil.

And the evil spirit has no sense of mercy. He desires to cause this child pain, torment, and death. Even on the way out of the young man there is an attempted ending of his life.

Satan is cruel, destructive, and a destroyer. When mankind dabbles in evil and sin, he is playing with an opponent who hates purely. Jesus warns us:

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy... –John 10.10a*

Peter warns us:

*Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. –1 Peter 5:8-9a*

There is a spiteful and severe enemy at large in the world. His craving is to blind the eyes of people to the light of Jesus. His aspiration is to annihilate. His yearning is to nurture fear, to propagate treachery, to plant envy, to escalate vindictiveness in the human race.

Oh man, do not toy with what God calls sin, for you only give opportunity for your enemy to ravage your life. What Satan tempts you to do seems satisfying on the front end, but it demolishes when put into practice. Like the lover whose lips drip honey while her feet rot away, so is the temptation towards sin.

Consider this young man and the cruelty of evil when considering to sin. You are not playing with a kind kitten but a hungry lion.

## 2. THE LESSON OF THIS TEXT IS THAT FAITHLESSNESS LEAVES US POWERLESS AGAINST EVIL

If there is one protection from all of Satan's temptations, would you get it? What if it was a mask you wore that said, "Jesus is Lord," and you could put it on and all the forces of evil would simply pass you by, leaving you unhindered? Would you wear it? What if there was a t-shirt that had the symbol of a cross that you could put under your clothes, and you could wander through this wicked world and not have to worry about temptation or evil influencing you or ruining your life? Would you put it on?

I have good news for you. There is just such a protection from Satan. Look:

*In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one--Ephesians 6:16*

There is a shield that is able to extinguish every flaming arrow the evil one shoots your way. The shield is effective for full protection. Faith is the issue of our text. When Jesus saw the commotion and asked what it was all about, the father of the tormented boy explained the situation. Jesus reacted like this:

*19 And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me."*

The issue, as defined by Jesus: faithlessness. Here is a generation of Jews, God's chosen people, being bested by a demon. The boy and his father are helpless. The Scribes are helpless. The Apostles are helpless. The Jews looking on are helpless. Why? Faithlessness.

Then the father begs Jesus to help, "if" He can! He doubted the power of Jesus. He seemed to doubt the compassion of Jesus.

The scripture says this:

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. –Hebrews 11:6*

This father wondered if Jesus was even able to save. He wondered if Jesus was willing to save. My friends, **what is faith? It is believing two things about God: One, that He is powerful and good, and two, that He has compassion on people who call on Him. That's all faith is.**

So Jesus confronted this man with his own unbelief.

23 And Jesus said to him, *“If you can’! All things are possible for one who believes.”*

He lets him know that you do not use the word “if” when referring to the powers of God. Second, He points the man to his own faith! God will listen to you, father, when you plead for your son, believing!

Finally, when the disciples asked why they could not cast out this particular demon, Jesus points to prayer, but He connects it to their faith, for prayer is always connected with faith. Look at what Matthew’s gospel says Jesus also said at the time:

*Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not drive it out?” And He said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. –Matthew 17:19-20*

Why could they not drive out this demon? Because of the littleness of their faith. How little was it? So little that a mustard seed was bigger. Here is an appropriate place to repeat the words of Corrie ten Boom who said, “You do not need a great faith in God, but faith in a great God.” And I would add, faith in a great and good God.

## CONCLUSION

So then, what should we do in response to this?

It is time to revive our prayer life. For some, it is time to begin a true and earnest prayer life. It is time to combine faith and prayer, as Jesus taught the apostles. It is time for us to approach God daily, on behalf of others, on behalf of ourselves. It is time to approach God not like the father did the first time, saying, “If” You can, but saying, “Because You can, and because You care!”

You might say, “but what if I struggle to trust God?” Welcome to the club. This text guides us in this also, for the father prayed correctly when he said to Jesus, “I believe, help my unbelief!” That is a prayer!

Christian, Jesus has died for your sins on a cross. God sent Him from heaven to give you eternal life. What more proof do you need that He listens to your prayers? What more proof do you need that He is able to handle the problems of life? How much of our faith is lost because we do not pray and ask God to do for us the things He desires and is able to do?

Now, some here may not yet know God personally, because even though Jesus died for sinners, you have never surrendered your life to Him. It is time. The best place to start a life of faithful prayer is with a prayer: “God have mercy on me, a sinner!”