

SERIES: **The Jesus Journey**
TEXT: **Mark 9:14-29** TITLE: **Desperate Dependence**

Context- Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain with the three

Contrast-

- Mountain top vs the Valley below
- Kingdom of God on display vs kingdom of Satan on display
- The Son is glorified vs a son is demonized
- The Father delights in his Son vs a father agonizes over his son
- The disciples lack understanding vs the disciples lack power



The Transfiguration by Italian painter & architect Raphael

Markan Sandwich- The disciple's failure as the bookends & a father's desperate faith at the center

Mark 9:14-16 When they came to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and scribes disputing with them. ¹⁵When the whole crowd saw him, they were amazed and ran to greet him. ¹⁶He asked them, "What are you arguing with them about?"

This is the kind of thing Peter wanted to avoid when he wanted to stay on the mountain.

But Jesus does not avoid the mess at the bottom.

The scribes are the Bible experts, & they're not too fond of Jesus- here they find reason to argue with the disciples

Mark 9:17-19 Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you. He has a spirit that makes him unable to speak. ¹⁸Whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive it out, but they couldn't."

V18 'they couldn't'= lit. *they were not strong enough to*

The servants of God might let us down- pastors, churches, other Christians; but press on to Christ.

What you need is not the servant, but the master ("I brought my son to YOU)

Keep in mind, this is all a lesson on faith- **There is a form of unbelief that looks like religious activity-**

The disciples had received this gift from Jesus to cast demons out (6:7) but they confused this gift as being *their* power to control at *their* disposal, rather than being God's power flowing through them and thus their need to be closely abiding with Him.

Mark 9:19 He replied to them, "You unbelieving generation, how long will I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring him to me."

It's not the man whom Jesus is frustrated with, but with the disciples and the scribes-

They're busy arguing (you can imagine the debate because of their failure)

but no one is focused on helping the boy and his father

Notice what Jesus' indictment is- Unbelief

At the heart of this situation is not the struggle with a demon, but the struggle with faith

Mark 9:20 So they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, it immediately threw the boy into convulsions. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

Usually, we see the demons plead with Jesus and exclaim who He is, but this one is different than others.

We see in the next verses that this demon is not only bent on distorting the image of God which we are all created in, but it's bent on destroying the boy's life.

Luke's account tells us this was his only son

It's a heartbreaking situation- this is not a grown up like other times, but a young boy.

Parents, the devil does not respect age, the demonic hates children, and it may look different in our day, but rest assured, hell is still after your children.

Pray for them, intercede for them, bring them to Jesus!

Mark 9:21-22 "How long has this been happening to him?" Jesus asked his father. "From childhood," he said. ²²"And many times it has thrown him into fire or water to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

'have compassion on US help US'- watching the demons do this to his son is a form of suffering for the father also.

Parents of adult children or teenagers who have gone astray know this pain all too well

"if you can"- The father has faith that Jesus would probably like to help if He could, but he's not sure if He can.

After having to deal with this for many years, and after the disciple's inability, he has '**Guarded Hope**'

He's not doubting Jesus's willingness, but His ability. (Again, this is a struggle of faith)

Mark 9:23-24 Jesus said to him, "If you can? Everything is possible for the one who believes." ²⁴Immediately the father of the boy cried out, "I do believe; help my unbelief!"

He went from thinking the problem might lie with Jesus, to understanding the problem lies within himself, his faith

"The father of the boy cried out"- lit. screamed- '**I DO BELIEVE HELP MY UNBELIEF!!!!**'

There is a misconception that you either have faith or you have doubt, but you cannot experience both at once.

This narrative reveals the paradox of reality about faith- **Faith is not always without doubt**

It's not about the *depth* of our faith but the *direction* of it

You don't need to be a spiritual giant to have the type of faith God delights in-

you simply need to recognize your need for Jesus- as He said, to be poor in spirit



3 types of faith & 3 types of unbelief

- Stubborn unbelief (like the people of Nazareth, & the scribes- will not believe/ a refusal)
- Settled unbelief (indifference/ apathy)
- Struggling unbelief (like this father's)
- Struggling faith (like a man in deep water desperately swimming)
- Clinging faith (like a man hanging on the side of a boat)
- Resting faith (like a man safely within the boat and able to reach others to get them in)

Jesus meets people not at the point of certainty, but at the point of honest dependence.

Desperate situations require desperate dependence on God

Mark 9:25-27 When Jesus saw that a crowd was quickly gathering, he rebuked the unclean spirit, Jesus didn't care for the show, he cared for the hurting saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you: Come out of him and never enter him again." ²⁶ Then it came out, shrieking and throwing him into terrible convulsions. The boy became like a corpse, so that many said, "He's dead." ²⁷ But Jesus, taking him by the hand, raised him, and he stood up.

Don't miss the gospel connection here:

A father hurts to see his innocent only son agonizing;

At first, the outcome appears to be a failure- they think he died..... but then life!

This points to the innocent Son of God, who's death seemed like a failure at first, until He rose again!

Notice that Mark doesn't tell us anything about the crowd's reaction to this deliverance.

The focus is on the lesson of faith for the disciples.

Mark 9:28-29 After he had gone into the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"

To their credit, they do want to learn from their mistakes

²⁹ And he told them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer."

"In effect he said to them, 'You don't live close enough to God.'... The disciples had been equipped with power direct from Jesus, but they had not nurtured power with prayer, and power had vanished." – Barclay

Faith is not always without doubt; but faith should never be without prayer

Prayer is the voice of faith

Jesus did not offer up a prayer to drive the demon out, so the prayer He has in mind is not some special incantation or spell, but a close relationship with God

Jesus, being the very Son of God, regularly devoted Himself to prayer (Mark 1:35; 6:45-46).

In contrast, when he asks the disciples to pray with Him, they tend to fall asleep (14:37-40; Luke 9:32)

The interaction with the father highlights the importance of faith; the exchange with the disciples emphasizes the necessity of prayer.

They are two sides of the same coin- dependence on God

MAIN TAKEAWAY- **We never outgrow our need to be desperately dependent on God**

Growing in faith doesn't mean we get to a level where we stand strong on our own;

It's the realization that says "*I can't. Lord, you can.*"

"The Christian life is what you do when you finally realize you can do nothing." - Dallas Willard

John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me.

CALL UP WORSHIP TEAM

Invitation: if you feel like your faith is weary or worn or weak- pray "I believe, help my unbelief"

Desperate situations call for desperate dependence... and Jesus meets us there

BULPEN-

The addition of some manuscripts- “**and fasting**”-

Garland- “This reading does not fit the context for two reasons. (1) Jesus has already dismissed fasting as inappropriate until the bridegroom is taken away (2:18-20). How can he now fault the disciples, as his opponents had done earlier, for not fasting? (2) This reading turns fasting into a work that succeeds in acquiring power from God. The incident stresses the necessity of faith and prayer, which involve complete dependence on God. The power grows out of one’s relationship to God in prayer and comes as a gift of grace, not as a prize for self-mortification.”

We’ve seen He is determined to face the cross head on; He’s also willing to face everyday problems as well.

There’s a lesson for us in this- there are those who can handle the big things well enough, but the little things get to them. We must have a steadfastness in the big and small issues of life

Pride has kept many of us from crying out

Bringing our doubts to Jesus does not offend Him; it is the evidence of faith, weak as it may be

Mark 3:14-15 Jesus had appointed them to cast out demons

V24- In Nazareth it was because of unbelief (Mark 6:6) that Jesus couldn’t do miracles there

So what makes the situation different here?

Unlike the people of Nazareth, who refused to believe, **the father’s unbelief is repentant**

V23 this the first time Jesus demands faith as a condition for an exorcism

This exorcism is different in other ones in the book of Mark; it doesn’t focus so much on Jesus’ power over demons, but on the disciple’s failure (at the beginning and the end) and the father’s need for faith (in the middle).

There is a form of unbelief that looks like religious activity-

The disciples had received this gift from Jesus to cast demons out (6:7) but they confused this gift as being *their* power to control at *their* disposal, rather than being God’s power flowing through them and thus their need to be closely abiding with Him.

Self-confident optimism may feel like faith, but it is unbelief because it disregards the prerequisite of human powerlessness and prayerful dependence on God.

V17, 19 never forget that people get help from Jesus, not from us (I brought YOU; bring him to ME)

The Gospel draws in people who are in pain, and they ought to place their hope in God, not us.

That’s a reminder to us as those in need, and as those in service.

Lewis B Smedes comments on the people who came to his church.

“I wanted them to be spiritual athletes, shoulders strong to bear the burdens of global justice that my prophetic world laid on them. But while I was offering them the precious promises and walloping them with the heroic mandates of the word of God, many of them were secretly praying, ‘O God, I don’t think I can get through this week- HELP ME!’...What they have in common is a sense that everything is all wrong where it matters to them the most. What they desperately need is a miracle of faith to know that life at the center is all right.”

“Prayer is a way of being empty and useless in the presence of God and so proclaiming our basic belief that all is grace and nothing is simply the result of hard work” – Nouwen

Faith is like Chesterton wrote, *something that always seems to be on the eve of disappearing but never disappears, a string which is always stretched yet never snaps.*

*Afflicted Saint, to Christ draw near
Your Savior's gracious promise hear
His faithful word you can believe
That as your days your strength shall be*

V26-27 is a foretaste that the Divine Father will raise up His Son

We never advance our need of Jesus

V19 we can see the frustrations of Christ's life here- in the mountain top he had to deal with His disciples shortsightedness, her with their unbelief

Faith bridges the gap between God's mighty power and our human weakness

Zechariah 4:6 So he answered me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by strength or by might, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord of Armies.

V29 in Matthew's account the focus on the reason why is their little faith/ unbelief

“Prayer seems to be the voice by which faith must express itself; it is almost, or even quite, impossible to conceive of faith coming into action except in connection with and by means of the utterance of prayer.”

-Bishop Harvey Goodwin.

V28 Jesus had sent them out to preach and heal and cast out unclean spirits, so why couldn't they cast this demon out between 9 of them?

“Prayer is as natural an expression of faith as breathing is of life.” Jonathan Edwards

“Prayer projects faith on God, and God on the world. Only God can move mountains, but faith and prayer moves God.” E. M. Bounds

Mark 14:36 And he said, “Abba, Father! All things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but what you will.”