

All Things Possible

Scripture: Mark 9:14–29

Code: 41-45

All right, let's open the Word of God to the ninth chapter of Mark's gospel. Mark chapter 9, and we're going to be covering a fairly lengthy portion of Scripture, contrary to the normal procedures here. Amazing, sometimes it's very brief, sometimes it's longer, depending on the nature of the text.

This is Mark chapter 9, beginning at verse 14. And rather than me read the text, I'm going to let the story unfold because it is a really fascinating story. But suffice it to say, there is a statement in the story to which I would direct your attention, and it's in verse 23, "All things are possible to him who believes." In response to that, in verse 24, "I do believe, help my unbelief." This is about faith. This is about believing. In fact, it is a lesson on the power of faith, a lesson on the power of faith.

We, according to the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, "Walk by faith and not by sight." Paul writing to the Galatians in chapter 2 says, "We live by the faith of the Son of God." Hebrews 11 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, and faith is the evidence of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." So we believe and we live by faith. Faith is the dominating feature of the life of every Christian because we have to put our trust entirely in what we cannot see."

What do we mean by that? We trust in a God we have not seen. We trust in a Christ we have not seen. We trust in a Holy Spirit we have not seen. We embrace a death and resurrection we have not seen. We trust in a justification we have not seen. And we look for a fulfillment in eternal heaven which we have not seen. Peter describes us this way, "We love the one we have not seen." And so we live by faith. It is not blind faith, it is faith based on evidence. And the evidence for our faith, what anchors our faith is the Scripture, the Word of God, because this tells us all we need to know and it is a true Word, it is a sure Word, it is an unassailable Word. But nonetheless, we live by faith.

For two years plus, the disciples had lived by sight. They had walked with Jesus 24/7. They had heard everything He taught, right out of His own mouth. They had seen all of His reactions with their own eyes. They had seen every way that He had dealt with, circumstances of all kinds running the gamut and they had experienced it with Him. They had seen every miracle that He had performed. Every time He cast out demons, they were there. When He raised the dead, they were there. They lived by sight. But soon they would have to live by faith.

They would always have the memory of what they had seen. In fact, that memory would be enriched and enhanced by the Spirit of God to allow them to write down what they had seen and heard, they and their associates, and it would show up in the four gospels and would be further delineated in the epistles that they wrote. But they lived by sight.

Soon, they would live by faith. The power was always in their midst because Jesus was always there. And so there was never a time when they didn't have the power because the very power itself was present. But here in this incident there is a lesson on the power of faith that they really need to learn cause it just so happens in this incident that Jesus is not there. How are you going to behave

when He's not there? How are you going to access the power when He's not there? They needed to learn that because that's the way they were going to have to live. In a few months He would die, rise again, ascend to heaven and be gone and they would have to live by faith... like we do. They knew what was true because they saw it. We know what's true because we have the Word of God, but we live by faith. We're saved by faith, sanctified by faith, and we hold the hope of glory by faith. Our faith is not perfect, but it is sufficient. What makes it sufficient is not our ability, but it is a gift of God. Your salvation comes by grace through faith, that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. The faith that we have to believe the Word of God, to believe the gospel is a sufficient faith because it is a faith given us by God and God designs it to be sufficient.

Perfect? No. Imperfect? Yes. Weak? Yes. Vacillating? Yes. Wavering? Yes. Doubting? Yes. But sufficient? Yes. This is the lesson that is before us in this text. We now enter in to a period of time in which Jesus begins to move toward Jerusalem where He will die and rise again and ascend. In this last segment of a few months, the focus of Mark is on lessons taught to the disciples and therefore to us. It is interjected by a few references to the coming cross. But the primary emphasis is instruction on issues that were critical for the training of His disciples and Apostles. The first lesson before us is on faith, the power of faith. Then there's a lesson on humility. And then there's a lesson on offenses. And then there's a lesson on the seriousness of sin. And then there's a lesson on marriage and divorce. And then there's a lesson on the place of children in the Kingdom. And then there's a lesson on earthly riches. And then there's a lesson on true wealth. And then there's a lesson on leadership and sacrificial service. And then there's a final lesson in chapter 10 verses 46 to 52 on faith again.

So all these lessons are bracketed by a lesson on faith at the beginning and a lesson on faith at the end. The lessons come to a conclusion at the end of chapter 10 and in chapter 11 verse 1, He enters Jerusalem for the final week of His life. I just gave you the coming lessons and consequently the coming sermons.

Now the lesson on faith is from verse 14 to 29. This is such an important lesson that Matthew records it and so does **Luke**. However Matthew and Luke give about a half a dozen verses to this. Mark gives us very lengthy section. We get a lot of detail from Mark. And if you wonder why that is true, apart from the purposes of the Spirit of God, it may well be because Mark's source, Mark's direct source for the things that happened during the life of Christ was Peter. He was in the presence of Peter in Rome. He was being mentored by Peter and Peter was an eyewitness and therefore Peter could fill in all of these very, very dramatic details.

Still, there are components in Matthew's account and Luke's account that will enrich even Mark's more lengthy account. Previously was the Transfiguration. The prior passage, Jesus in glory on the Mount with Moses and Elijah. Peter, James and John with Him there, we remember that. Here He comes back down to the valley, back down to reality. Out of the glory, back down to the struggling world, like Moses coming down from the mountain and from the presence of God to a faithless people waiting for him at the bottom of the mountain, Jesus comes down from being in the glorious presence of His father to the faithless people waiting for Him below as well.

Now we know the disciples and apostles by now pretty well. We know that they are characterized by misunderstanding, shallow faith. In fact, just in chapter 8, the previous chapter, and verse 14 through 21, you remember that section, the Lord asks them, down in verse 17, "Do you not see or understand? Do you have a hard heart? Having eyes, do you not see? Having ears, do you not hear? Do you not remember?" And then in verse 21, "Do you not understand?"

The constant issue with them is no matter what He did, no matter what He said, they had a hard time grasping it. They are definitely a work in progress. And here we find out how desperately they needed to understand. They needed to understand a lot of things. Here faith is the issue. Then humility is the issue, and then on through the list that I gave you. But for now, since faith is their life, and our life, and faith is the source of power and theirs and ours, it's critical that they learn to grow in their trust, their confidence and their dependence on the Lord because soon they will not be able to have them in their sight. So they go, Peter, James and John do, from the glories of the mountain with Christ and the presence of God in the cloud and Moses and Elijah, down to the troubles and pain and the misunderstanding of their companions, as well as the demonic disruptions of life in the world.

Juxtaposing these two together, the Transfiguration and this, really draws some amazing contrasts. The Transfiguration happens on a mountain, this happens in the valley below. In the Transfiguration, there is glory, here there is suffering. In the Transfiguration God dominates the scene. Here Satan dominates the scene. In the Transfiguration, the Father is pleased. In this incident, the earthly father is tortured. In the Transfiguration there's a perfect Son. Here there's a perverted son. In the Transfiguration, you have fallen men in holy wonder. In this story, you have a fallen son in unholy horror. It is a dramatic scene, one of the most dramatic in all the New Testament. It involves demon possession. A boy filled with a demon, an unclean spirit, this is always a reality, it is a reality today. Demons are in the world doing the work of Satan, they always have been since the Fall. They are not as readily manifest to us because they choose to operate covertly, as we have told you. They like to stay invisible. They like to disguise themselves as angels of light, appearing to be very religious and very moral in a sophisticated culture like ours. They don't want to surface and be known to be doing what they are doing, but they're doing it.

However, in the day of Jesus, they put on an all-out blitz against Him. They proliferated their expressions of power so that they were manifesting themselves here and there in some degree willingly. And then when Jesus showed up unwillingly, He unmasked them. And so there was this unequaled, unparalleled exposure of demon activity during the years of our Lord's ministry, never such before or since here such an occasion. This demon would have been very happy to be undiscovered in this boy, although it perhaps would have been figured out by some that this was demonic activity. Most people would have simply diagnosed him in another way as having some kind of a mental disorder. In fact, according to one of the other New Testament writers, he was deigned to be a lunatic...a lunatic.

So let's find out about him. Verse 14, "When they came back to the disciples, down the mountain, Peter, James, John and Jesus, the four of them, they came back to the disciples. They saw a large crowd around them and some scribes arguing with them." Down in the valley below are the nine other apostles and perhaps some other assorted followers and disciples. And there's a large crowd gathered around them because the entourage of Jesus assumed that Jesus would be there. Whenever people saw Jesus' people, they would assume His presence and so the crowd begins to collect around the apostles who are known to be His associates, even though He's not there. And that's a very important aspect of the story. This large crowd drawn by Jesus, only to find that He's not there.

And then we see the scribes, and scribes arguing with them. They are located in the area around Caesarea Philippi and there would have been Jewish towns and villages in that area on the north part of Galilee. There would have been scribes there. The scribes were always around Jesus. They

were there for the purpose of discrediting Him. They were there for the purpose of trying to protect their turf against His teaching and to drive the people back to the systems that they had advocated away from what Jesus taught. So they were there and they started arguing with the disciples of Jesus. They were arguing probably about what they always argued about. They always argued about Jesus' view of God and Jesus' view of the Kingdom, and Jesus' view of their misrepresentation of the Old Testament. So they were carrying on a debate with the disciples.

The disciples are on their own. And as it turns out, things have not gone well. So there's no doubt another component that's been added to the scribes arsenal as they come at these disciples. There's little doubt in my mind that they were also mocking them. They were also ridiculing them, and we'll find out why.

"Immediately," verse 15, "when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and began running up to meet Him." As soon as Jesus arrives with Peter, James and John, the crowd sees Him and moved directly toward Him as fast as they can. They are greatly amazed. That is a very, very strong word. I can't tell you now strong that word is. It's a word that you would probably translate awestruck. This would be the kind of attitude that you see silly junior highers have when a rock star shows up. This is that kind of attitude. This is a very, very strong compound word. It's used only in Mark and he uses it again in 14:33.

Some people have said, "Well that's because Jesus had glory on His face, like Moses did when he came down the mountain, because Jesus was still shining from His Transfiguration and the presence of God." No, that's not possible because in verse 9 Jesus said, "When you go down the mountain, don't tell anybody what we've just experienced. That would be contradictory to that." That's not the issue. The issue is simply that He was the healer, He was the wonder worker, He was the miracle man, and the crowds were always attracted to Him.

They also ran to Him because the disciples had disappointed them. They had disappointed them not in a general sense, but in a very specific sense. We find that out as we begin to read verse 16. "He asked them, 'What are you discussing with them? What are you and these scribes talking about? What are you debating about? What are you arguing about?'"

He steps in here in a wonderful way, He's their protector. He's their cover. He's their rescuer because they've gotten themselves into a situation they're not handling very well. The word "discussing" is often used to describe confrontations with religious leaders. A common word for that, you see it in chapter 8 verse 11, chapter 12 verse 28. So they're having an argument and Jesus says, "What's the argument about? What is the argument about?" We would assume that the argument is about the typical theology issues.

Well, the scribes don't say anything. They keep their mouth shut. And the disciples don't say anything either, they keep theirs shut. Nobody answers until somebody in the crowd volunteers to speak. Verse 17, "And one of the crowd answered Him." We don't know why the scribes didn't answer, probably because they would much rather have had a debate with the disciples than with Him. They learned they didn't fair well with that. But why didn't the disciples respond? The disciples didn't respond because they may not have been doing very well in the debate. But more importantly, they were embarrassed and they were actually humbled and they were being mocked and scorned. And in their embarrassment, they kept their mouths shut. They not only had lost the argument theologically, perhaps, but they had definitely lost the argument in terms of the power that they

should have been able to demonstrate but did not.

So this man speaks up. By the way, Matthew adds, Matthew has this account in chapter 17, Luke in chapter 9. Matthew adds that the man was falling on his knees. Falling on his knees. And Matthew says he called Him, "Lord." So this man has some faith in Christ in His person as well as His power. He comes in a very reverent and humble way. Matthew also says He shouted. It's noisy. There's a din going on. And there's also a great, great burden in his heart. So he comes, falls on his knees and he shouts. "Teacher," as well as Lord, Lord and teacher, "I brought You my son possessed with a spirit which makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out and they couldn't do it."

That's why they didn't say anything. They were embarrassed. This man says, "I've brought You my son, You just didn't happen to be here. I brought my son assuming You would be here with these, Your followers. My intention was to get my son to You because he is possessed with a spirit, a demon." Demons are spirit beings that take up residence in people. And the demon had caused this boy, at the end of verse 17, to be mute. Not only mute, we find out later in the story that he was also deaf. The boy could not hear and the boy could not speak and it had nothing to do with some kind of physical problem, it had to do with demonic control. The demon had such power over him.

It may also have to do with brain damage, that the demon had literally inflicted on this boy. And I'll tell you how, as you continue to read. Verse 18, "Whenever it seizes him...whenever it seizes him." The demon seizes him.

This is not some kind of genetic disorder, this is not some kind of childhood disease that he's had to live with, the symptoms are totally in the control of the demon. Luke adds that the boy when seized by the demons suddenly screams and this is where the sort of general diagnosis comes in Matthew 17, he's a lunatic. The demon periodically produces this power over the boy, it makes him scream and then it slams him to the ground...slams him to the ground. Strong verb again, concussion, after concussion, after concussion, after concussion. Little wonder that the symptoms show up, classic symptoms of a grand mal seizure, though that kind of seizure can be caused by some dysfunctional aspect of the brain, this is trauma. This demon is literally battering this kid and he foams at the mouth. This is not again by some brain dysfunction, this is demon domination causing such trauma to the boy's body that I think he's scarred the brain, throws him into convulsions. He begins rolling around, as it says later, on the ground and then he grinds his teeth and stiffens out.

Demons have great power over bodies. They do. They can do this. Satan it says, in Hebrews 2, is even given the power of death. But that's all within God's permission. Satan is a great power in the world. His demons are great powers in the world.

Luke 9:39 uses the verb *suntribo* which means to crush or shatter or maul. It says the demon is mauling this poor boy. No wonder he brought this boy to Jesus who had a reputation of being able to cast out demons.

Well the problem is, end of verse 18, they couldn't do it. I brought him to Your disciples, they couldn't do it. Luke says he begged them and they still couldn't do it. That's very strange because back in chapter 6 you will remember this, in verse 13, it says, "Regarding the Apostles, they were casting out

many demons.” How did they do that? Verse 7, “He gave them authority over the unclean spirits.”

Jesus had delegated power to them, His power delegated through them to cast out unclean spirits and they had been doing it. They had been doing it. Chapter 6 says that. “And they were casting out many demons.” What’s going on here? Why do they now fail? What’s wrong? What happened? Well Jesus answers that question in verse 19. “He answered and said to them, ‘O unbelieving generation,’” hum, that’s the problem. The problem is what? They didn’t believe. “O” is not a normal greeting, that’s an emotional expression. “Unbelieving generation.”

He had called the nation of Israel in chapter 8 verse 8 an adulterous and sinful *genea*, generation, people. A way to describe the nation. Here He’s talking to His disciples, His apostles. And He says, “You are faithless.” That could be true of the crowd who didn’t believe in Him, certainly was. It could be true to some degree of the father who certainly didn’t have a mature faith in Him. But the focus really is on them. Why couldn’t they do this? O unbelieving generation.

You know, when you think about the things that Christ suffered, this... this, I think, in my mind would be one of the toughest things to deal with. I will tell you this, just as a man, as a human being, a lack of trust is a hard thing to handle. If you have spent your life trying to live a life worthy of trust, put yourself in a place and live a life in which people trust you and believe in you, distrust, mistrust, false accusation, wrong assumptions, assuming the worse, it’s hard to deal with. But that’s peanuts compared to being the Son of God, God the Son, living in glory, accustomed to perfect angelic trust, perfect angelic love, perfect angelic devotion. And then to come down here and have to deal with these men who have a lack of faith in Him, in His power. That was part of Him learning obedience as a slave by suffering the wounds inflicted on Him, not only by His enemies, but by His own followers who struggled to trust Him.

His words are harsh. “O unbelieving generation,” and Luke says He added, “perverted generation, how did you get so twisted so fast?” As the words fell from His lips, maybe the disciples thought of Deuteronomy 32. Deuteronomy 32 is an indictment on the nation Israel. Deuteronomy 32, just a couple of verses, verse 5, “You’re a perverse and crooked generation.” Verse 20, “They are a perverse generation, sons in whom there is no faithfulness, no trust.” They were waning in their trust. Had they trusted before? Yes, but not here. Had they believed before? Yes, but not here.

What was the difference? Always before Jesus was... where... there. Now when He’s gone, they’re struggling to believe. They better learn how to believe when He’s gone because He’s going away in a few months and He’ll be gone permanently. They need to learn how to believe. “How long... He says... shall I put up with you?” That’s a soliloquy, like “O ye of little faith.” That’s exasperation, holy exasperation. And he must have thought for a moment, maybe, about the pure fellowship with the perfected Moses and Elijah as a stark contrast to coming back down and dealing with these guys. So in holy frustration He says, “How long shall I put up with you?” Like several times when He said, “O ye of little faith.”

“Bring him to Me,” He says at the end of verse 19. “Bring him to Me.” At this point, the man would get what he wanted and the demon would get what he didn’t want. They would both come face-to-face with the sovereign Lord for the good of the man and for the bad of the demon. So they start to bring the boy to Him. And according to verse 20, they brought the boy to Him. Luke adds, “And while he was still approaching, as they’re bringing the boy, the demon begins to go into action.” This is really dramatic. “When He saw him,” when the eyes of Jesus saw the boy, the demon could then see

Jesus as Jesus saw him. “Immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, literally convulsed him, and falling to the ground, or being thrown to the ground, he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth.” Terrible trauma, a kind of smashing to the ground. It’s not a stretch to imagine that this... you know, they say about football players, you can have three concussions, and that’s all you can have. Who knows how many hundreds this young boy had had, smashing his brain against his skull by the power of this demon? And now he is rolling and foaming at the mouth in the midst of this convulsion.

While this dangerous, demonic display of vile power is going on, and again I think this demon always was trying to kill this boy, but the Lord never let him. This is the part, one of the parts that I love most about the story, verse 21, and you would probably skip over it if I didn’t help you to see deeper into it. “And He asked his father, ‘How long has this been happening to him?’” Why does He ask that question? Does He need the information? No. He knows everything. Does it matter according to His power, like, you know, if it’s more than five years, the statute of limitations has run out and He can’t do the miracle? What’s the point? What’s the point?

I’ll tell you what the point is. There’s only one point. He wanted to hear the father’s pain. Why? He wanted the father to tell Him the story. Why? Because the father was not coming to a power, the father was coming to a person. And if there’s anything demonstrated in the miracle ministry of Jesus Christ, it is the compassion of God that He cares and Christ cares and He cares about your pain, He cares about your suffering and He cares about the struggle you have with your children. He cares about the things that break your heart and He wants to hear. This is not a power, this is a person... this is the ultimate person. This is the ultimate one who loves people. This isn’t for the crowd and this isn’t for information, this is for the man to unfold his heart to find a partner for his pain. Why? Because Jesus is a sympathetic and merciful High Priest, is He not? Who can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities. He wants the father to have an opportunity to rehearse what he has suffered.

Well, his father responds in verse 21, “From childhood.” It’s been this way his whole life. We don’t know why. There’s nothing in the story about why. Certainly wasn’t some sin in the boy, and it wasn’t some sin in the father. You remember the blind man in John 9, they said, “Who sinned, this man or his father, or his mother?” And Jesus said, “Nobody sinned, this is for the glory of God.” I don’t know in every case why God allows Satan to do what he does to certain people, but in this case, this also was for the glory of God. And though the demon wanted to devastate the family by killing the boy, it never was going to happen because this boy was going to be for the glory of God, like the blind man. So there’s no reason given for why this boy, other than the outcome, makes the reason obvious.

God controls demon power. He controls Satan who has the power of death. I think the demon had tried to kill this boy all through his life, it throws him into a fire. Why would he do that? Why would the demon convulse the boy and slam him into a fire? To kill him and open fires were everywhere. That’s the way you cooked, and that’s the way you heated everything, by fire, they were everywhere. And on other occasions into the water. There were wells because that was the source of water, there were pools of water everywhere. Apparently the father had spent his whole life in this unbelievable effort to keep his son from being killed by this demon, rescuing him out of wells and pools, and rescuing him out of fires. What a life for this father to live.

But there must have been in the heart of the father a rising glimmer of hope because Jesus is talking to him with such sympathy about his beleaguered battered and brain-scarred boy. Back to verse 22, he admits that the demon was trying to destroy him, trying to kill him. And then he says this, “But if

You can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

That is a pretty weak statement of faith, wouldn't you say? But if You can do anything? He's not saying, "Will You," I think he's convinced of the will you because of the conversation, the sympathy of it. What he's not sure about is the "can." Earlier in Mark 1 the question was, "Since You can, will You?" Here it is, "Since You will, can You?" Take pity, is *splanchnizomai*, *splanchna*, bowels, feelings. Do you feel deeply inside, in this translation to showing mercy, take pity, show mercy. And the word "help, help us," really a very interesting word, *boetheo*, it's such a rare word. It means to run to the aid of someone who needs help. Or to run to the aid of someone who calls for help, cries for help, beautiful word. If You can, will You run to my aid and help me?

And Jesus said to him in verse 23, "If You can!" and that's not a question, that's an exclamation. Another way to say that would be, "If You can, are You kidding?" It's an elation of surprise. How can that be in question? The very fact that you're here with a demon-possessed boy would probably indicate that you have known about others who have been demon possessed who have been delivered. How can you be asking the question? How can you be doubting My ability, My power, daily miracles of healing and demon deliverance, having gone on for well over a year in the area, or nearby. If I can?

And then Jesus gives the lesson. "All things are possible to him who believes." All things are possible to him who believes. That's the heart of the lesson, the challenge of faith. Do you have the faith to believe that the Lord can do it?

He has talked about faith in chapter 5, chapter 6. He'll talk about it in chapter 10, chapter 11. But this is the first time He has shown the importance of faith and made it a mandate in Mark's gospel. What we have here is an issue of faith. It's not an issue of power for these men, it's an issue of accessing that power that comes by faith. Jesus healed many people with no faith, faith wasn't always an issue, He healed lots of people who didn't believe. He healed the friends and relatives of people who didn't believe, but here the lesson is about the power of faith because He's going to be gone and the disciples are not going to have Him around. The power will still be available to them, that's what He says in the Upper Room, "I'll do all things according to My Father's will that the Father may be glorified in the Son. I'll do it if you ask in prayer believing."

They needed to learn how to access the absent power and make it present by faith. So the principle is for them and for us. Christ isn't here, now we live by faith. They would soon live by faith and not by sight. The power is available. His power is available to those who believe in Him and that power.

Well the father responds in verse 24. "Immediately the boy's father cried out," so much emotion here... so much emotion. And remember, while this is going on, his son is rolling around, foaming at the mouth and he screams over the din of whatever else is happening and says this, "I do believe, help my unbelief."

Boy, there's an honest man. I believe, I believe in You, I believe in Your power, but I have a lot of doubt and I admit it. Is that enough? "All things are possible to the one who believes, that is all things within God's will are possible, all things that are acceptable to God are possible. But how much faith do you have to have?

What do you mean? All things are possible to those who believe but to what degree do you need to believe. I do believe, help...but he uses the same verb, *boetheo*, again. Run to my unbelief. Run to my unbelief. Run to my aid, present tense, and help me keep believing. Come and dispel my doubts.

The Lord never expects perfect faith, that would be pointless, though he is worthy of it. He only expects imperfect faith because that's all He's ever going to get out of us and all of us are going to believe with a measure of doubt mixed in.

While Jesus is having this conversation, the crowd starts to swell, verse 25. "And Jesus saw that it was rapidly gathering and it's time to act." The word is spreading that He's there. The crowd is swelling. He decides to cut the conversation, not because of the chaos, not because of the commotion, He was used to that, but because of the fact that His public ministry was over...it was over. He is not the public healer anymore. That part of His ministry is in the past. He's not going to wait for the crowd. He's not attempting to prove anything to the crowd. He wants no more publicity than is necessary because the emphasis now is on the instruction for His disciples.

So quickly He acts. He rebuked the unclean spirit. He rebuked it. Matthew says it came out of him at once, "Saying to it, 'You deaf and dumb, or deaf and mute spirit,'" that's where we get the deaf part, Jesus said that he was deaf, the father may have not known that cause he couldn't speak. "You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again."

In Matthew chapter 12, verses 43 to 45, Jesus says there are times when a demon leaves a man and seven more come back, and the end is worse than the beginning. Not this boy...not this boy. How long had this been happening to him, verse 21 says? From his childhood. His father had dealt with this the whole life of this boy. And now at last, in an instant, Jesus commands the unclean spirit to come out of him and never return again. And the demon reacts the way the demon reacted in the first chapter of Mark, you remember in the first chapter? Verse 25, "Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, said, 'Come out of him,' and He threw the man into convulsions and the unclean spirits screamed through the man's voice and came out."

There's a final protest there. There's a final protest here by the demon, a vicious protest, verse 26. "After crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, 'He's dead.'" Convulsions, literally *sparasso*, convulsing him. After screaming, he convulsed him. And he uses the adverb, *polla*, *p-o-l-l-a*, would be a transliteration of it. And if you just looked it up in a lexicon it will say much or many, but it is an interesting Greek word that moves to the context. Its meaning is basically carried by the verb that it modifies. And if it's convulsion, it can't be many convulsions. It adapts the verb, so it's terrible convulsions. If it was money, it would be much money. But if it's convulsions, it's terrible convulsions, that's a good translation of that adverb, context determines its meaning.

And with that final protest, again hammering this poor boy into another terrible set of convulsions, the demon came out. He could do nothing else under the power of Christ and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them thought he's dead. Maybe, you know, maybe this would have been close to the end. Maybe one more crash against his skull by his brain would have done it. But he lies limp, exhausted by the convulsions and further traumatized and he's so still they think he's dead.

And I love this, verse 27, "Jesus took him by the hand and raised him up, and he got up." Or better,

“He stood up... He stood up.” Such a beautiful picture. Luke adds, “Jesus gave him back to his father.” The tenderness of that, what a magnificent scene. Now that’s a pretty good illustration from which to teach a lesson, don’t you think? So let’s go to class, verses 28 and 29. That was the story, here’s the instruction.

“They came into a house,” we don’t know what house, some house in Caesarea Philippi somewhere, came into a house. This is private time now and we’ve got to get the disciples to the place where they can live by faith. “So His disciples began questioning Him privately.” This is the greatest way to teach, question and answer. “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” Which means they had...what?...tried, they had tried. “Why couldn’t we do it? We did it before, we did it back in chapter 6 when You empowered us and sent us out two by two. Why couldn’t we do it?”

“And He said to them, ‘This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer.’” This kind? *Genos*, this species, this kind of spirit, this kind of unclean spirit. And maybe it’s talking about all of them, all of that kind of being, fallen angels. You will never be able to command on your own. You’re going to have to depend on Me and prayer is the highway that faith takes into the power of God. Prayer is the highway that faith takes into the power of God.

They obviously tried to do it on their own, didn’t they? Tried to do with their own strength, their own power, maybe because they had success in the past. You’re not going to be able to live like that. When I’m not here, you’re not going to be able to think that you can pull it off. You need to be dependent on Me. For every spiritual miracle that the Lord ever does, we have to depend on Him, do we not? Even evangelism, we can’t depend on the cleverness of our presentation, that’s all about the power of God. It’s only going to happen by prayer.

Well that’s all that Mark says. But we should be thankful for what Matthew adds. Let’s go to Matthew 17, because you’re still thinking in your mind just how much faith does it take, how much faith in my prayer to access God’s power. Not...look, I’m not going to cast out demons, this isn’t a lesson on how to cast demons out. This isn’t a lesson on how to do miracles, raise dead people. This is simply a lesson on how to access the power of God on behalf of the things that God wills to do. Certainly salvation is one of them. The work of sanctification, how He orders His providence to accomplish goals that exalt His Son and advance His Kingdom, that’s the lesson. We can’t ever approach Kingdom ministry from a human standpoint, from the strength of men. How much...how much faith do we need?

He says to them in verse 20, “Because of the littleness of your faith,” here we go again, the problem with you is your faith is so small, “O you of little faith.” And that is something He said to them again and again and again, Matthew 6:30, Matthew 8:26, Matthew 14:31, Matthew 16:8, Luke 12:28, “O you of little faith, O you of little faith.”

The lack of faith shut their prayers down. They thought they could handle it. And then this is so important. I’m not asking for a lot out of you, I’m not asking for perfect faith. “Truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you’ll say to this mountain, move from here to there and it will move and nothing will be impossible to you.”

He’s not talking about literally changing topography. He’s simply saying life is full of insurmountable things and you will never have the power to alter those things. But if you have the faith of the size of

a grain of mustard...that is the smallest seed used in agriculture in Israel, tiny, tiny seed.

You know, there are a lot of ways to teach that. I've heard people say, "You need to have more faith, you need to have your faith get up to the point of a grain of mustard seed." That isn't the point. The point is, you've got that much already. Come on, that's minimum. The Lord is not expecting you to be some person of great faith, magnificent faith, all pervasive faith. Or you'd have a hard time getting going in your Christian life, wouldn't you? All it takes is the faith of a grain of mustard seed. And you know who the model of that is? The father...the father. The miracle was done on the basis of the father's faith. "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. I believe my faith is mixed with doubt. I want more faith. Run to the rescue of my weak faith. Help my unbelief. That was sufficient faith.

Our Lord shows these men that a new believer who hasn't been with Jesus at all, who had a very beginning faith, if he exercised that faith, had enough faith to bring down the power of God. I mean, it's a hard lesson to learn if you're a disciple and you've been around Jesus for two and a half years or so, and He's telling you, if you could just be like this stranger who has never walked with Me or talked with Me before. You need to exercise only the simplest faith, that's the grace of God. But persistently, like Luke 11 and Luke 18, you remember the stories of prayerful persistence? You have not, James says, because... what... you ask not. If you have the faith of a grain of mustard seed, and you take that faith on the highway of prayer into the highway of God, you will see God do mighty things.

Listen, Jesus could have let them succeed without persistent faith. He could have let them succeed without prayer. He could have let them succeed thinking they could do it on their own. That would be a bad lesson, wouldn't it? He could have made them think prayer wasn't really necessary. And so He was gone and the instant it happens and He says, "You're going to have to learn that you're going to depend on Me even when I'm not here, and the way you demonstrate that dependence and that trust and that faith is through prayer." So we're not learning here how to cast out demons. We're not learning here how to change the earth's surface if we believe strongly enough. We're learning here how a very small amount of struggling faith can draw us in to God dependently, trustingly and cause God's power to be released to do His will even through our lives. It's an incredible lesson for those of us who live by faith.

Father, we thank You again for Your truth. Thank You for the way the Word of God opens up to us. We feel like we spent the morning with our Lord and in this very setting and how alive it is and full of rich texture and meaning. Thank You for the way the Word speaks. Thank You for the fact that it's alive and powerful, penetrating, life-changing, instructive, sanctifying. Use it to shape us into Christ's likeness.

Father, now we go away from this experience, into that much more challenging one. It's as if we've just been on the mountain with You and now we go back into the valley of the realities in which we all live. May we take the lessons we've learned. Teach us to live by faith, to translate that faith into persistent prayer and then to see Your power unleashed in our lives, in ways that bring You glory. We pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

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