

## I BELIEVE, HELP MY UNBELIEF

MARK 9:14-29

*Tim Nixon, Clearcreek Chapel*

This morning we continue to work our way through Mark chapter 9.

Throughout the first chapters of Mark we saw continual evidence of Jesus power, and authority as the Son of Man.

Beginning around chapter 7, we begin to see a transition in Mark's writing. There is a change in focus. There is a change in theme. And it may appear to some as very subtle. Pastor Russ introduced it a couple weeks ago.

We are in the middle of that new focus right now.

We began to see this shift as Jesus began to talk to the twelve about his impending death on the cross. And so while we see Jesus continuing to perform miracles, continuing to cast out demons, continuing to heal the sick, the focus is not on his power, but on the cross.

We are walking with Jesus toward the cross, and what that entails for the twelve, and others who must believe on the Son of Man. And so as we look at another instance of Jesus casting out a demon this morning, keep in your mind the fact that this very well may not be the point of the story. Why, because we are walking toward the cross. Our posture is toward the cross. Our view is toward the cross.

Turn to Mark 9:14:14-18 as we begin this morning.

Last week we took a wonderful look at the transfiguration in the beginning verses of Mark chapter 9. Just as Moses and Elijah came down from their respective mountains, Sinai and Carmel, to find trouble below, we see this same picture portrayed here as Jesus descends the mountain.

He finds trouble below. He finds unbelief, and he finds hostility.

There is a very famous painting called "The Transfiguration". You can see it on the screen. The top half of the painting is full of light. It conveys the transfiguration that we saw last week. The bottom half of the painting reflects our story this morning, in all its darkness and confusion. While the Shekinah glory is being displayed at the top of the painting, down below there is chaos. The faces of the nine remaining disciples, the scribes, and those in the crowd are almost obscured.

We see a father pleading for his son who is obviously very sick.

We see the helplessness of those around him in their confusion.

One of the men appears to be looking at a book, could it be full of spells and incantations?

There are two disciples pointing up to the mountain, possibly indicating that they realize their only hope is Jesus. Could these two actually be seeing the gospel clearly?

**But Jesus isn't there. Jesus is up on the mountain somewhere.**

The painting shows a marvelous contrast.

- It displays the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration.
- Down below there is sin and there is unbelief and there is hostility.
- The transfiguration happens on a mountain; this happens in a valley.
- 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, here the earthly father is tortured.
- In the transfiguration we see the perfect son, here we see the demon possessed son.

Whatever has taken place on the mountain, it's another story down below.

And so as we have just read we have nine apostles, crowd, scribes, and a father with ailing son. And my assumption is that these people have come to see Jesus.

As with every place Jesus has gone they have brought their sick to be healed.

And so when Jesus comes down and appears on the scene, they were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him.

Finally, finally there is Jesus. And in a sense we see the truth of the great hymn, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace".

Up until this point our eyes have been focused on the evil and the chaos and the despair in the faces of those arguing amongst themselves. But now we begin to focus on Jesus, and he saying something.

And if you remember God's instructions last week to Peter, in my own words, "Jesus is speaking, shut up and listen."

Verse 19

Jesus is facing the Apostle's unbelief. How can that be possible?

- Haven't we just seen over the past six weeks Jesus feeding the 5000, feeding the 4000?
- Haven't we seen Jesus healing a blind man, and casting out demons?
- Haven't we seen Jesus heal a deaf man?

### **And the disciples had done this before!**

Remember back in chapter 6 where we read, "regarding the apostles, they were casting out many demons."

How did they do that?

The next verse makes it clear, "Jesus gave them authority over the unclean spirits."

### **And yet the disciples were, not blind, but unable to see.**

Remember in chapter 8 Jesus words to these same disciples,

- 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?
- Do you not understand?

Do you see and understand how this must have been so very grievous to Jesus?

“Bring him to me.”

Verses 20 - 21

- Why is Jesus asking the father this question?
- Why doesn't Jesus just cast out the demon and move on?

Jesus is asking the question for the sake of the father, because he wants to draw out from the father something. Jesus has compassion on the father as much as he has compassion on the son.

And this interaction helps remind us that the focus of this portion of Mark is leading to the cross, not simply on the power and healing ability of Jesus.

Will the father believe? Will the father, “take up his cross?”

In the next two verses, this conversation between Jesus and the father, lies the heart of the story. It's not the healing of the boy that is most significant. In fact, the healing of the boy is almost insignificant to this story.

The focus of our text this morning is in the conversation between Jesus and the father.

Verses 22-24

The cry of the father in verse 23 is probably to be expected. He has brought his son to be healed and the apostles were unable to do so. And so this father's faith is wavering. He is already experienced failure at the hands of those whom Jesus commissioned to do this very thing.

But Jesus is in control of the entire situation here.

**This interchange is extremely significant. The father has said to Jesus, “if you CAN help, will you please help, not if you WILL help.**

**The father is not questioning Jesus willingness to help, he's questioning Jesus ability to help.**

Jesus responds clearly in verse 23, “If you can!”

This is not a question from Jesus, this is an exclamation. In our modern vernacular we might say it this way, “If you can? Are you kidding me? How can you doubt my ability, my power, the daily miracles of healing and demon deliverance that have gone on for well over a year in this area, the reason that you came in the first place?”

Jesus responded simply with, “All things are possible to him who believes.”

It is the heart of the lesson for the father.

It is the heart of the lesson for us this morning.

Before we go on let's explain this text, because this is one of those top extraordinarily abused passages of Scripture that is taken out of context.

It is misused much like the text "Judge not lest you be judged."

"All things are possible to him who believes." What does that mean?

- Some claim that if we only had enough faith we would never be sick and always have enough of everything. But it cannot possibly mean that. Did Paul not have enough faith when he prayed for the thorn in the flesh to be removed?
- If I had enough faith could I bring my grandmother back from the dead?
- If I had enough faith could I grow hair on my head?
- Oh, only if I had enough faith!
- Do you remember in first Samuel 4 when Israel brought the Ark of the covenant from Shiloh to go with them into battle and thinking that the Ark itself would, "save us from the hand of our enemies?" It is not like that. It is not some incantation or good luck charm.

No, it doesn't mean any of those things.

- It means that I can humble myself, even when I don't understand, and truly believe the promises of God found in his Word.
- It means that like Job, I can truly say, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away; Blessed be the name of the Lord.
- It means that I submit myself to the ministry of Jesus Christ on the cross and commit my entire life and death to that truth.
- It means that I believe the word of God and am willing to do whatever God asks of me while on this earth to serve and glorify him.
- It means I will humble myself and take up my cross and follow him.

And the father responds with great honesty, "I believe; help my unbelief."

His son is rolling around in the dirt, foaming at the mouth, and screaming over whatever else is happening and the father cries out with faith, "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?"

God never expects perfect faith, that would be pointless, although he is worthy of it. No, God expects imperfect faith because that's all he is ever going to get from us and we are all going to believe with some measure of doubt.

We will never attain spiritual perfection. We will never completely trust him. We can never lay everything on the altar. But we can believe.

Verses 25-27

At this point Jesus turns from the father, and he turns to the evil spirit, rebuking it and commanding it to depart the son.

At this point in the story it is almost anti-climactic. In the great movie that begins before the foundation of the world and ends with the new heavens and the new earth, this is such a small cameo part.

And maybe as we walked toward the cross through this story and through this part of Scripture, we begin to see Jesus as the strong man that has come to the house and is casting out the demons that have occupied it. And Jesus is saying now, "This house is mine! I am beginning to spoil principalities and powers and triumphing over them and soon it will be finished."

And in an emotional and beautiful picture, Jesus reaches down and takes the boy by the hand raising him up and returning him to his father. And the father takes the son who can speak and hear for the first time in his life and it is a magnificent experience.

And then the scene changes in verses 28 and 29.

Jesus now that were alone together teach us.

- Why couldn't we cast out this demon?
- We did it before, when you empowered us and sent us out two by two. Why couldn't we do it this time?

I wish I could go into an explanation of what Jesus meant by the phrase this kind. What kind is he talking about? This kind of demon? All demons of all kinds? God is not clear here.

The lesson here is the relationship to their lack of faith with their lack of prayer. And it is a lesson that they needed to learn, because soon Jesus would not be with them day-to-day. The apostles, and the believers at Clearcreek Chapel, need to understand that this is not a lesson on how to do miracles.

This is simply a lesson on how to access the power of God on behalf of the things that God wills to do.

This is simply a lesson that reminds us of those things we spoke of earlier; the humility and submission to the gospel, the cross.

- Jesus could have let them succeed without faith.
- Jesus could have let them succeed thinking they could do it on their own.
- Jesus could have let them walk away thinking prayer wasn't really necessary.

But they needed to learn dependence on God when Christ is not there.

How will they humbly approach the throne of grace throughout their lives as God transforms them into the image of his son?

The story of the father and the son today pictures what Paul writes in Romans chapter 8 when he speaks of our adoption. Because of the cross, because of the saving work of Jesus Christ, when we are in desperate need, we humble ourselves and we can cry, "Abba father!" And don't let the grammar of that passage slip by you. It is not simply, "Welcome home daddy." Oh, to the contrary. Is a humble, pleading cry with an exclamation point - for mercy. It is not a cry for Jesus power and authority, is a cry to the father based on Jesus finished work on the cross followed by his resurrection.

And at the end of the story today it is not the little boy, it's not the father, who is at the center of the story.

What fills our gaze this morning is the immensity of Jesus Christ. The one who displayed his glory on the mountain has now descended into the valley below and has displayed the incarnate glory which is his.

To God be the glory, great things He hath done,  
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,  
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,  
And opened the life-gate that all may go in.

Oh, perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,  
To every believer the promise of God;  
The vilest offender who truly believes,  
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

Great things He hath taught us, great things He hath done,  
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;  
But purer, and higher, and greater will be  
Our wonder, our transport **when Jesus we see.**

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,  
Let the earth hear His voice;  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,  
Let the people rejoice;  
Oh, come to the Father, through Jesus the Son,  
And give Him the glory; great things He hath done.