

Sermon Title: I Do Believe; Help My Unbelief!!
Scripture Text: Mark 9:14-29

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 2-24-19

Find your way, please, in your Bibles, to Mark Chapter 9, where we left off last week at the conclusion of Verse 13; and by wonderful coincidence, we're going to pick up at verse 14 this morning. And today, we're going to cover probably more ground than most of our recent messages. This time, it's one of the rare incidents in the life of Jesus where Mark records more than the other gospels do. Mark is the shortest of the gospels, and usually, if something's recorded in Matthew and Mark and Luke or John—any combination of them—Mark has the littlest.

This involves a miracle of casting out a demon. Now, that's the kind of thing that you might have expected, and you certainly saw plenty of it in the earlier chapters of Mark, where he strung together a whole bunch of miracles to show the credentials to prove that Jesus is the Son of God. But in this case, the miracle isn't the main point of the passage; it's not the focal point. What is important for understanding this text rightly is to know how it fits into the life of Jesus, and the role that it plays in this particular gospel. The miracle itself doesn't add anything we don't already know to the credentials of Jesus, but *more* important is that you understand: This is part of Jesus's training of the Twelve. The Twelve Apostles needed to be ready to minister when He was gone, so He has a lot to say to them; and during this time, several things are going on.

You've already heard me mention that, ever since the close of the so-called Great Galilean Ministry, Jesus has been withdrawing from the huge crowds, and He's been, instead, majoring on spending time with His disciples to prepare them for the Cross, for the resurrection, and for their ministries to follow. He's just been telling them over and over again—and He's just told Peter, James, and John on the way down the mountain from the Transfiguration—not to tell others that He is the Messiah until after His death and resurrection. To do so would have just complicated things prematurely, and He wanted the whole story to be told.

He has also, now, begun spelling out the predictions of His death and resurrection in clear language. Now, He had alluded to it earlier; He had spoken of "the sign of Jonah"—Him being three days in the great fish like Jesus being three days in the earth (see Matt. 12:39-40)—but now, He's saying it openly: The Son of Man must "go to Jerusalem" (Matt. 16:31), He must be betrayed, He "must suffer many things," He must "be killed," and He will "rise again" (Mk. 8:31, NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted).

Now also, during this time—and even before He left the Galilean ministry—He has also been unveiling mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Remember, in the Bible a "mystery" is something not revealed in the Old Testament, now made known in the New (see Col. 1:26). These mysteries have to do with how everything fits together in light of the fact that the leaders of the Jews—the ones who *should have been* embracing the Messiah—rejected Him. And how is that going to fit? No one, understanding only the Old Testament, could figure it out, that the Messiah was to come *twice*, and there would be this extended period of time between the two comings. The first time, He would make the "once for all" sacrifice for sins (Heb. 10:10); the "second time," He's going to come in glory; He's going to bring the kingdom of heaven to Earth (Heb. 9:28; cf. Matt. 25:31).

Sermon Title: I Do Believe; Help My Unbelief!!
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Now, *among* those mysteries—Mark doesn't mention this one, but Matthew does—He has made the first mention of what He calls "My church" (Matt. 16:18). This a new entity that's going to come into existence in the near future, from their frame of reference, and it would be in that time between the first coming and the second coming.

Now, in light of all of that, it's quite reasonable that the disciples could be wondering, "Well, what about all those promises that aren't yet fulfilled—especially the things the prophets said concerning a glorious kingdom (e.g. Dan. 7:13-14)? If the King's going to be killed, how can that be?" So Jesus has just taken Peter, James, and John with Him up onto "a high mountain" (Mk. 9:2), somewhere north of Caesarea Philippi—probably somewhere along the way to the summit of Mount Hermon—and He gave them a glimpse of what it will be like when He returns in glory at His second coming. That was what we call the Transfiguration, and that was what we studied last Lords Day in Verses 1 through 13 of Chapter 9.

Now, the event that immediately follows the Transfiguration is the beginning of a new phase, if you will, of the training of the Apostles. There's a series of lessons from where we are in Chapter 9, all the way through the end of Chapter 10; and you can see how they tie together when you realize: The whole purpose of this is to prepare them to minister in His absence. They'd never been apart from Him, for two and a half years. And the incident before us today is going to start this series of lessons with a lesson about faith, and there'll be several more taking us through Chapter 10. It's going to start with a lesson on faith, it's going to end with a lesson on faith; in between, there's a lesson on humility, a lesson on offences that cause stumbling, a lesson on the seriousness of sin, a lesson on marriage and divorce, a lesson on the place of children in the kingdom, a lesson on earthly riches, a lesson on true wealth, and then the lesson on sacrificial service, then another lesson on faith.

So that brings us up to this moment where we rejoin our text at Chapter 9, Verse 14. Jesus, Peter, James, and John are coming down from the mountain; and they find, when they arrive there, the nine other disciples have gotten themselves into an interesting situation while the Transfiguration was taking place. Now, I've chosen the title based upon a verse in here that I love: "I do believe; help my unbelief" (vs. 24). And here's how we're going to work through this narrative: Number 1—They couldn't do it, Verses 14 through 18. Number 2—Jesus says, "Bring him to Me!" (vs. 19). Number 3—the lesson: All things are possible, Verses 23 through 29. So we'll just let the passage flow, and see how it unfolds for us.

It starts out with this issue: They couldn't do it; Chapter 9, Verse 14—"When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them." Now, "came back" means, they came back from where they had been up on the mountain, for the Transfiguration. And they *knew* that the nine guys would be there—the nine Apostles—and there was a little entourage of other disciples that had followed them, but there was a bigger crowd than just that. It was a crowd that had gathered because, obviously, word got out that Jesus was in the area, so people came, as they always did. Now, I'm sure it wasn't the size of crowd like they had dealt with constantly in Capernaum and all around southern Galilee while Jesus focused His ministry there, but it was a sizable crowd, nevertheless.

Sermon Title: I Do Believe; Help My Unbelief!!
Scripture Text: Mark 9:14-29

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Seeing the disciples of Jesus—and they would be known by sight—people came expecting to see Jesus. He wasn't home, so they engaged the nine Apostles and whoever else was around while they were gone. And notice it also says, "and some scribes" were "arguing with them." That's a lot like saying, "The sun came up yesterday," because that's what the scribes do. They just want to argue about anything and everything; they're always looking for a way to try to discredit Jesus. And what was going on there, that you're going to see in a moment, had given them a *prime* opportunity to really bug the nine Apostles who were there; probably, that's what they were arguing about.

Now, it doesn't really matter what they argued about—because if it did matter, we'd be told—but we *do* know, it was a bad day for those nine; they were not able to help someone in desperate need, and they were getting an earful of verbosity from the scribes, to boot. So Verse 15—"Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and began running up to greet Him." Mark used a strong word here; just *seeing* Jesus, "they were amazed." Now, remember, He's up near Caesarea Philippi—that's *out* of the beaten path of where He had spent most of His ministry there, so they were amazed *just to see Him*. Most of these people, maybe, were seeing Him for the very first time.

So Verse 16—"And He asked them"—now, there's two possible antecedents for "them": the scribes or the disciples. I think He was *probably* asking the disciples: "What are you discussing with them?" Now, Jesus didn't ask because He needed the information; He asked because He wanted the matter at hand to be clear to everyone else—He wanted somebody to lay it out. The word "discussing," by the way, translates a word that, throughout the gospels, is almost always used for the arguments brought up by the Jewish leaders against Jesus. They never sat down with Him and had a calm, factual, respectful discussion about anything; they always attacked Jesus and His men—they always disputed about things.

Now, it's interesting that, the Nine didn't answer, and the scribes didn't answer. The scribes probably put a sock in it, because they knew, from experience, how it would go if they started arguing with Jesus. They *never* won an argument; they'd always been humiliated. But the nine Apostles also didn't seem to find words right away, because they weren't doing so well with this problem at hand, and they were probably totally at a loss to answer whatever the scribes were throwing at them.

But an answer comes. There's one in the crowd who speaks up; he was the one who had gotten this whole incident started. He was likely exasperated about the argument that was going on, because it was taking attention away from the problem that he wanted Jesus to solve. So, Verses 17 and 18—"And one of the crowd answered Him, 'Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute'—and we're going to find out later, deaf also—"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 could not do it.' " So this man had come from, probably somewhere in the region—we don't know how far. He brought his son to Jesus; and given the condition of the son, that might have been a difficult thing to do. When Jesus wasn't there, where he thought he was going to find Jesus, he told his problem to the nine disciples who *were* there.

Sermon Title: I Do Believe; Help My Unbelief!!
Scripture Text: Mark 9:14-29

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Date: 2-24-19

By the way, in Luke's description of this, in Luke Chapter 9, Luke adds that this was his "only" son. As if it's not a terrible enough problem, as if that's not serious enough—and to be possessed with demon is serious in every condition—but it's his *only* son; that just adds to the pathos of this. All of his parental care was poured into this one boy.

Now, the issue was demon possession. And we're going to see, before long, that, on a scale of seriousness—as I say, *all* demon possession is extremely serious—this one was *very* serious. Jesus has cast out thousands of demons prior to this. Remember that, for a span of a few weeks, He had even given the power over demons to the Twelve Apostles, whom He had sent out two-by-two on their preaching tour, and they had cast out demons during that time. So it's reasonable, therefore, that when the Nine were there, waiting for Peter, James, John, and Jesus to come back down the mountain, and this guy came with a demon-possessed son, they probably figured, "We've got this! We can help." But they were unable to handle it. So there they were, standing with a blanket of embarrassed silence draped over them. "What do we do here?"

Now, remember what we've learned about demons: They are fallen angels; they've been doing the work of Satan ever since they fell with him (see Rev. 12:4, 9; cf. Is. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:11-16). Almost always, demons remain hidden. Second Corinthians explains to us: They choose to disguise themselves as angels of light (see 2 Cor. 11:14); they're masters of disguise. They don't *usually* grab people and throw them to the ground and make them foam at the mouth, and they don't *usually* inflict bodily harm—that's *very* rare. Most of the work of demons is through ideas and writings and philosophies and, as I say, religious things—disguising themselves as angels of light (see Jn. 8:44b; cf. 1 Cor. 10:20; 2 Thess. 2:10). But during the ministry of Jesus, very often demons openly assaulted Him and did horrible things to people, right out in the open; because in the presence of the Son of God, the identity of the demons was unmasked, and He always exercised power over them.

Well, I'm sure that word had gotten around, and even though this man had obviously never seen Jesus before, he knew that his son's problem was the work of a demon, so he sought out Jesus. Now, the prevailing opinion about this guy's son was probably not that he had a demon; most people probably thought it was a mental disorder. And we understand that because, when you read Matthew's version of this—in Matthew Chapter 17, Verse 15—the father describes his son as a "lunatic." Now, that's not politically correct in our day and age, but the word—in case you wonder where "lunatic" comes from—you look it up, it literally means "moonstruck." *Luna*-tic, that's where the word comes from. And that word was also used to describe an "epileptic" (Matt. 17:15, NKJV), which fits what was going on with this boy.

Now, you say, "Well, there's one of those 'contradictions'—Mark says that the father said, 'He has a demon.' Matthew says the father said, 'No, he's a lunatic.' " Well, the point is, there's no contradiction. Neither passage says that this is a verbatim record of everything that was said. He was *regarded* as crazy, he was *regarded* as a lunatic, but the *father* had more insight, and he understood that the *reason* for that, ultimately, was demonic. So he used the words that people used to describe him, *and* he described it as demonic, so there's no contradiction.

Sermon Title: I Do Believe; Help My Unbelief!!
Scripture Text: Mark 9:14-29

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Date: 2-24-19

Based on the description that we have in our text of what this demon did to the boy, it's probably *both* demonic *and* the result of brain damage from the things that the demon did to him. Luke 9, in Luke's version of this, he uses a verb that speaks of the father describing the demon as "mauling" his son; a word that can mean to crush, to shatter, or to break in pieces. The boy probably had multiple concussions—without ever taking one single snap in the NFL. So it's appropriate, both to mention his need for a demon to be cast out, and to describe that he needs to be healed. It's appropriate to say, "he has a spirit"; it's appropriate to say he is regarded as a "lunatic." It was both severe physical trauma and a severe spiritual condition.

So the disciples had cast out demons many times (see Lk. 10:17), when they went on their preaching tour; but this time, they failed. And in their failure is embedded the seed of the essential lesson that Jesus wants to teach; it's a lesson about faith. Apparently, the disciples had come to think that, "You know, Jesus gave us this power, so, we got this! We can cast out demons"—but they couldn't. You see, that power belongs only to the Lord. For a very brief period of time, on just a few occasions, Jesus granted to the apostles the ability to identify and cast out demons, like He did. Perhaps they were just jumping right in and rebuking the demon; the father told them what they needed, and they said, "We got this. Demon, get out of here! Go home!" Didn't work. Simply put—they couldn't do it. They were apparently trusting in their own abilities. They were failing to realize that, *all* such spiritual authority belongs to God, and it's granted to people only as a special gift by His grace.

So, just imagine how this father felt. He heard Jesus was nearby—he got his hopes up. At great sacrifice, he brings his son to find Jesus, and he doesn't find Jesus. Oh, but he found His Apostles! His hopes are sky-high! They can't fix it. And now, there's a bunch of scribes jumping in and arguing with them, and turning all the attention away from his son; and his despair must have reached a new low when even the disciples couldn't cure his son. So that's the immediate situation here: The nine Apostles couldn't do it; they couldn't cast out this demon. That's a bad situation to be in. But in the *bigger* picture, Jesus has it all under control. And He is working on training them how they're going to have to do it when they minister, when He isn't physically with them. In a sense, you could say, they had lived by a sight for two and a half years. They'd seen Jesus, they'd been with Him all the time, they had virtually never been out of his immediate presence (see Jn. 17:12). And now they're going to need to learn how to live by faith instead of by sight, and minister without Him present.

So, Number 1—They couldn't do it. Number 2—The words of Jesus: "Bring him to Me." And right away, we see that this is a lesson about faith, and we see that from what Jesus says next. Chapter 9, Verse 19—"And He answered them and said, 'O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!' " Jesus was not pleased with His men. He's rebuking them: "O unbelieving generation"—didn't have to put "O" in there, unless there's great emotion. And it's aimed at the disciples, and it reveals that the cause of their inability to cast out this demon was their failure to *believe*; their *faith* wasn't up to the task. This is among the strongest and harshest words that Jesus ever spoke to them. "After *all* the time you've been with Me, you can't do this? How long shall I put up with you? How long shall I have to be with you, to get through to you?" This is "holy exasperation," one person called it; I like that. It's like when He said to them, "You of little faith" (e.g. Matt. 16:8).

Sermon Title: I Do Believe; Help My Unbelief!!
Scripture Text: Mark 9:14-29

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Date: 2-24-19

Now, as soon as they brought the boy to Jesus—He said, "Bring him to Me!" (vs. 29)—as soon as they did, the demon went into action with its finest cruelty: Verse 20—"They brought the boy to Him. When he saw Him"—and the "he" refers there to the spirit—"When he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth." Now, while that's going on—and I'm sure everybody there is [astonished gasp] staring at this boy, and their hearts are just ripped out of them; "What can we do? What can we do?" Well, Jesus calmly asks the father a question. Now, again, He doesn't ask the question because He lacks data; He's asking the question in order to make a connection with the father—He wants to draw out from the father the expression of the pain that fills his heart. He wasn't just coming to this vending machine of exorcism named Jesus. He's got to deal with a man, and Jesus is going to connect to him man-to-man, person-to-person.

And what the father says makes it all the more painful for us to observe: Verses 21 and 22—"And He asked his father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' And he said, 'From childhood.'" Now, that tells you, even though we don't know exactly how old he was, he was not a *little baby*; he refers to "childhood" in the past tense, so, I don't know—8, 9, 10, 12 years old, maybe even a teenager, maybe even a young adult. "He said, 'From childhood. It has often thrown him'—now, get a load of this—"both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" "What pain! What desperation! What yearning for relief, that this father had, thinking he has at last come to where his son's going to be delivered and cured; and then, he's been just disappointed by the Twelve. I can hear the man's heartache. I think he put it something like this: "But if You can do *anything*, take pity on us and help us! Your men couldn't do anything at all—can You just make it less *severe*? Could it just be once a week, instead of once a *day*? Have pity on us! Help us!"

Now, you've got to realize the picture that's being painted here of the cruelty of this demon. Throwing him into the *fire*? Throwing him into the *water*? How many times had his mom or dad had to rescue him from being shoved toward the oven or toward the open fire, or pushed to the edge of the well or the riverside, or whatever it is? You've got to realize that, God had spared this boy's life just to get to this day, just for this encounter, so it could be recorded in the Scriptures, and we could learn what the Apostles learned. It should remind you of that man over in John Chapter 9; remember the man that was born blind? Now he's an adult, and the disciples asked, "Well, why was he born blind? Was it his sin or was it his parents?" And He said, "No, no, no, no, no—that's really bad thinking." That was some of the awful theology of the Pharisees, gone to seed. Actually, He said, "This man's blindness is for the glory of God." That doesn't make it a *good* thing, but it's for the glory of God. This little boy got to this day for the glory of God.

He has a demon; he needs to be delivered. They couldn't do it—Verses 14 through 18. Jesus says, "Bring him to Me!"—Verses 19 through 22. Now, the lesson: All things are possible. Here comes this powerful and delightful exchange between Jesus and the boy's father. The man had enough faith to seek out Jesus, but his faith was weak, his faith was inexperienced; he was untrained in walking by faith. He believed Jesus *could*, he believed Jesus was *willing* to deliver his son; but apparently, based on the failure of the Nine to deliver him, I'm not sure

Sermon Title: I Do Believe; Help My Unbelief!!
Scripture Text: Mark 9:14-29

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 2-24-19

he believed that Jesus was actually able to do it. And then, Verse 23—"And Jesus said to him"—I'll try to read this as I think it ought to be inflected—" 'If You can? If You *can!*?!? All things are possible to him who believes." "If You can" was an exclamation of surprise to make a point. He said, "Have you ever *heard* of Me? How many thousands of demons have I send scurrying? How many sick people have I healed? How could you be questioning My *ability*?"

And then He says this remarkable phrase: "All things are possible to him who believes." *That's* what this passage is all about! It's about *faith*; that's the lesson He wants to teach. Faith is essential in order to access the *power* of God to do the *will* of God (see Heb. 11:4-12). Now, put it together. It's a little bit harder in English than it is if you were reading it in Greek, because we use the word "believe" when we're using a verb, and we use the word "faith" when we use the noun. In Greek, they're the same word with different endings: *pistis* and *pisteuō*. "Faith" is trust in God, *and* the willingness to submit yourself to Him and obey Him. So the context of "All things are possible to him who believes" means that, when you trust God *explicitly*—without reservation—you can accomplish whatever God wants you to do. Now, "All things are possible to him who believes." I believe—but I can't walk out into the parking lot and turn your 1956 Volkswagen Bug into a 2019 Lexus, okay? That's not what we're talking about under "all things"—[we're talking about] what God wants to do (see 1 Jn. 5:14-15).

Now, that sets up the response of the boy's father, which is one of my favorite verses in all the New Testament, because I know what he felt like, and I suspect you do, too. It's Mark 9:24—"Immediately the boy's father cried out"—it doesn't just say he answered. I mean, can you imagine the emotion that's built up, and when the Son of God is looking him in the eye and saying, "If you *can*?" He just "cried out and said, 'I do believe; help my unbelief.'" And there had to be a tear with that last phrase. He had enough faith to believe in Jesus's, power but he was totally honest about struggling with doubt in the midst of his faith, all at the same time (see Matt. 28:17). When he says, "Help my unbelief," he uses the same word for help that he used when he said, "Take pity on us and help us!" This is a *desperate* situation.

Now understand: You *must* come to God by faith; put your trust in Him. You must "*live* by faith" (Gal. 2:20; cf. Hab. 2:4). You must pray "in faith" (Jas. 1:6; cf. Mk. 11:24). But while God calls you to faith, He also understands that, until we are with Him face-to-face, any faith we exercise will be *imperfect*—but He's never limited by that! Even the *best* of your faith is always tinged with some measure of doubt. I would go so far as to say, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief"—I think that's the truly honest condition of any believer anytime, anywhere; if you're actually talking about how you feel toward the Lord.

Now, what Jesus does next is *exactly* what you would expect; and you've been waiting for this, anyway: Verse 25—"When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering"—we knew there were at least nine Apostles and whoever else had been traveling with them; and when the four come down from the mountain, there's already a *bit* of a crowd there; and then when Jesus comes, they run over to Him, and now there's a bigger crowd gathering. And then, He rebukes the demon, and all of a sudden, the boy's writhing on the ground in excruciating horror. And "when Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again.'" "

Sermon Title: I Do Believe; Help My Unbelief!!
Scripture Text: Mark 9:14-29

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 2-24-19

Now, the father had mentioned that the son was "mute" (vs. 17). Here, we're told also that he was deaf—made deaf and mute by this spirit. So think about this: On top of it all—on top of watching the suffering of his beloved only son—this father has, for the lifetime of the son, been deprived of communication with him; at least, most normal communication—surely they had, signs: "Do you want some bread," et cetera, et cetera. But, oh, how sad it is.

Now, he's come to Jesus; the deliverance is at hand, and would you notice that Jesus tells the demon, "Come out of him...and do not enter him again." Why would He add that? Well, because, if you read Matthew 12 and if you read Luke 11, you know that Jesus warns that a demon cast out of a person can wander for a season and then return with others even more evil, if that person doesn't come to faith; if the heart is just empty and there's a void, the demon can fill it. So Jesus is, in essence, by saying, "Go away, and by the way, you can't come back," He's, in essence—behind the scenes here—saying that, the father and the son have saving faith. They're really coming to Him in faith.

Well, this especially cruel demon doesn't go without one last fit of rage, as he leaves: Verse 26—"After crying out"—and remember, the boy is a deaf-mute; so this isn't the boy, this is the demon using the boy's body to make this noise—"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 is dead!' " They thought the demon had finally won and killed the boy. Now, of course, Jesus again does exactly what you would expect: Verse 27—"But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up." It doesn't say it in the text, [but] I bet he said something like, "Dad, I love you"—the *end* of that horrible suffering. But as glorious as that is, the deliverance from the demon is not the point of the passage. How wonderful for the boy, how wonderful for the father—but it's all allowed to happen in order to teach everybody else there about faith, and its record in the Scriptures to teach *us* about faith (see Rom. 15:4).

Now, you can be very sure that the embarrassment of not being able to deliver the boy—while the scribes were yapping at them in addition to all that—made those guys pretty attentive to what Jesus had to say when they were alone. And that's what brings us to the conclusion of the lesson: Verses 28 and 29—"When He came into the house, His disciples began questioning Him privately"—boy, I'll bet!—"Why could we not drive it out?' And He said to them, 'This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer.' " The disciples had *done it* many times before—but they had just been commissioned by Jesus, they were there preaching the gospel, they were focused completely on what Jesus told them to do; and now, in this random situation, they couldn't do it for this boy.

Now, "This kind," He says, "cannot come out by anything but prayer." There's two ways to take "this kind." You can take it in a very general sort of a way: "This kind" of situation needs prayer. In other words, you'll *never* cast out a demon apart from praying. That is a legitimate way to take this, and I actually probably lean that way. But you can also say: "This kind" includes the implication that we know is true: Some demons are more powerful than others, some demons are more wicked than others, and more difficult than others. Jesus alludes to that in Matthew 12 and in Luke 11. We know that when demons are described—same as with angels—terms like military ranks are used for them. So, maybe He's saying, "Once you get

Sermon Title: I Do Believe; Help My Unbelief!!
Scripture Text: Mark 9:14-29

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 2-24-19

from Private First Class Demon to Sergeant Demon to Captain Demon to Major Demon—you know, it's going to take more work. There may be an element of both there. But I think what He's saying is, "Guys—the father came up and said, 'My son has a demon,' and you just snapped into action—'We got this!' I wasn't there. Why didn't you pray? Why didn't you call on My Father? You *know* that I do only the bidding of My Father—do you want to be any different than that? Do you think *you've* got it all figured out? Do you think, in your own wisdom and your own abilities, you can handle all of this stuff?" Remember, it's a lesson about faith. What did He call them? He didn't call them "weaklings," He said, "O *unbelieving* generation." The disciples needed to learn something *vital*ly important: You can't go on the momentum from your last victory. You can't go in your own strength. They neglected to pray. They needed to learn—and this is the first of this series of lessons—that they needed humble, earnest prayer, that that's critical to seeing the power of God work through you to do His work.

Now, what should we do with this? We know of no demon-possessed children here today. Don't ask those serving in the Twos and Threes—they may be tempted to suspect...No, no—that's not true! We don't have anyone here who is asking for miraculous deliverance from a cruel, unclean spirit. But yet, this passage is here for *us*. Do you get the lesson? Do you believe? Salvation is by grace alone—you can't do anything to help it (Rom. 11:6). It is brought to you by faith alone—not by any of your works (Eph. 2:8-9). It is in Christ alone—for the power is *only* His, and the sacrifice was His (Jn. 14:6; Rom. 3:24-26). It is for the glory of God alone (Rom. 16:27), and it's based upon the Scriptures alone (Jn. 5:39). Do you believe?

Now, I know pretty much everybody here, if not all of us—you believe. Is your daily attitude like the father here? "Lord, I *do* believe; help my unbelief! I trust You, but honestly, Lord, I don't see my way out of this! I believe You, Lord, but—what next? What do I do? What do we do? How are You going to provide here? I do believe; help my unbelief." In other words: Do you realize that you need God's help and God's mercy and God's grace just as much now as you *ever* did? If you've walked with award for 60 years, you are just as needy today as you were the day you first believed. "All things are possible to him who believes." That's how you can do the will of God. Do you take the time to pray before you act? It's *so easy* to become prayerless—especially in a world like ours, where we don't live at the level of immediate need most of the time. Oh, how easy it is to think that you have a situation under control.

I think I told you how I spontaneously prayed my first day that I was ever out of the country, and I was going to go speak to a bunch of pastors, and I hadn't been one for a year yet. I was the expert, though, because if you're more than a hundred miles away from home, and if you need a translator, you *must* be an expert. And I woke up that morning and I just said, "Lord, I'm yours"—and I left the sentence open. "I'm Yours and..." And what I meant was, "I believe; help my unbelief! Please, do what You will through me. Do what You will around me. I *do* believe; help my unbelief."

Father, we pray, along with that little boy's father: "We believe; help our unbelief." Help us to stand firmly in Your grace, and by Your mercy, to see You do—through us and around us—so much more than we could ever ask or think. Thank You for teaching us the way of faith. Help us to learn the remainder of these lessons from our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.