

Message #31**Mark 9:14-29**

We are living in an interesting time especially when it comes to churches. Most measure the success of a church by the numbers. If you have large buildings and if you have large offerings and if you have large programs, you are successful and the community considers you to be a winner. As a result, almost every church wants to be the biggest, the richest, the most entertaining and the most influential. For most people the idea of ministry success is determined by the number of dollars, the number of attendees and the number of police directing traffic when the service is over.

But the truth is what men think make a successful ministry and what God says makes a successful ministry are two different things. God's standard is very different from man's standard. Never does that point become more evident than when you come to this text here.

At this point in the life of Jesus, had you asked the three disciples how it is going, they would probably have said we are experiencing the incredible blessings of God. We just saw Jesus in His glory on top of a mountain and down the mountain the crowds are amazing. Things are great, numbers are good and what we are doing is working.

But if you asked the Son of God about the ministry, He would give you another perspective. He would say **there is no question my disciples have numbers, but what they don't have is faith. My disciples certainly have numbers, but what we don't have is God's power.**

What an amazing experience it had been for the three disciples. They had been up on the mountain and they saw Jesus Christ in all of His glory. They knew the fact that He was the Messiah, but that did not mean they had a faith that could accomplish much. They had no clue that they needed to depend on Him and pray to Him to succeed in life and ministry. So when they come back down the mountain, Jesus needed to teach His disciples an important lesson about ministry:

NO MATTER WHAT WE HAVE SEEN JESUS CHRIST DO IN OUR LIVES, WE MUST ALWAYS HAVE A FAITH THAT DEPENDS ON HIM AND PRAYS TO HIM BECAUSE THIS IS WHERE WE RECEIVE POWER TO ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING.

What we really have here are disciples who lack faith and lack prayer. As one commentator said, **where there is a lack of faith there will always be a lack of prayer, and where there is faith there will always be prayer.**

We cannot succeed at anything without depending on the Lord and talking with the Lord.

Verse 14 opens with the fact that they came back to the other disciples. We may remember Jesus had taken Peter, James and John up on a high mountain for His transfiguration (**9:2**). So now they are coming back down the mountain.

It had been good for them to be up on that mountain, but now they were coming down to where things weren't so good. A.C. Gaebeliens said they come back down to helpless disciples, unbelieving and argumentative scribes and demon-possessed people.

One commentator said it is like a Monday morning when you have to go back to work. You leave a full day of worship and inspiring teaching and you have been refreshed and then you have to leave church and go back to the real world.

They got a glimpse of the glory of God, but now they had to leave it and go back to the real world. **It is good to enjoy mountaintop experiences, but don't forget you will soon be back down in the valley and you will need your faith and you will need to pray.**

For Jesus coming down the mountain it means He is coming down to begin moving to the cross. So for Christ, the coming down from this mountain means He is coming down to a world of sin, which He will become and death which He will endure.

According to **verse 14**, when they got back they saw a large crowd gathered around the disciples and they also saw some bully scribes arguing with the disciples. These guys were experts at the O.T law and it may be that they are arguing because they are claiming that had Jesus really been who they said He was, then as His disciples, they should have been able to heal the boy.

They are probably challenging Christ's authority as the Messiah and when the disciples could not cast out the demon, they were questioning His authority.

According to **verse 15**, when the crowd saw Jesus, they were amazed and began running to greet Him. Now we must ask what it is that amazed this crowd. Mark brings out that Jesus often amazed the crowd by His teaching (1:22; 6:2; 11:18; 12:17) or by some miracle (1:27; 2:12; 5:15, 20, 42; 6:2, 51; 7:37; 12:17). But Jesus had been up on the mountain and hadn't done a recent miracle, nor had He been teaching. So what amazed this crowd? Probably there was some "lingering effect of the transfiguration." This crowd saw something in Jesus that amazed them. Like Moses coming down from Mt. Sinai and his face shined (Ex. 34:29-30).

Now when they came running up to Him, according to **verse 16**, He asked them what are you discussing with them. The pronoun "you" could refer the disciples, or the scribes or the people. **Now Jesus knows what is going on, but the reason He asks this is to make them publicly reveal the matter.** This is an extremely important point—if you are going to see God do things for you, you must talk directly with Him through Jesus Christ. You will have to admit the truth to Him. Now there are three main responses to this episode from the life of Christ.

RESPONSE #1 – A father responds to Jesus. 9:17-18

When Jesus asked this question, a father answered Him and said "teacher," I brought my son to you because he is possessed by some spirit. Luke adds it was his "only son" (Luke 9:38). Father tells the truth about the son, he is demon-possessed. He does not try to sugar coat this.

This is the last demon-possession case in Mark and it is the most detailed account of the other two gospels, Matthew and Luke.

Now you will notice from **verse 17** that he brought his son to “Him.” That pronoun refers to Jesus. So he initially brought his son to Jesus, but Jesus was not there. He was up on the mountain. Apparently the disciples said, well we can take care of this for you. Bring your son to us, we can do this. You don’t need to see Jesus, we can handle this.

Now this demon caused five major problems for this boy:

(Problem #1) - The demon made his son mute—he could not speak. **9:17**

(Problem #2) - The demon seizes his son and slams him to the ground. **9:18a**

(Problem #3) - The demon caused his son to foam at the mouth. **9:18b**

(Problem #4) - The demon made his son grind his teeth. **9:18c**

(Problem #5) - The demon made his son stiffen out on the ground. **9:18d**

Verse 18 says the father asked His disciples to cast out the demon and they couldn’t do it. Notice what he said, **“they could not do it.”**

He is right. They couldn’t do it. They did not have the power to heal this boy. **This is the point these disciples need to learn, in and of themselves they have no power to accomplish anything in ministry.** Sometimes it takes a failure in our lives to show that we cannot succeed ourselves. We tend to get so full of ourselves and sometimes a failure shows us the truth.

Now what is most interesting about this is that when he first brought the demon-possessed boy to the disciples, the disciples thought they could do this. We usually think that lack of faith means we don’t believe something will happen. These disciples believed something would happen. They initially believed they could cast out this demon. They had done this many times before (Mark 3:15; 6:7, 13). They figured they could do it again. They knew the process. **Their faith was in themselves and their abilities and in the process they had followed before. They had faith, but not in the right object. Their faith to succeed was in themselves and not the Lord.**

Now this was probably what the Scribes were arguing about. They were trying to say Jesus is not really who He claims to be and the proof is that His disciples cannot do what they should be able to do if Jesus really was who He claimed to be.

RESPONSE #2 – Jesus responds to the situation. **9:19-27**

There were two ways Jesus responded to the situation.

(Way of Response #1) - Jesus responds verbally. 9:19-24

Now **verse 19** says He answered “them.” He answered them and gave them a scathing rebuke. He called them an “unbelieving generation.” He says, “how long shall I put up with you people?” You just don’t get it. Get what? **Everything in your relationship with God is all about faith in Me.**

Now the big question is who are the “them”? He could be referring to the scribes. He could be referring to the crowd. He could be referring to His own disciples. He could be referring to the father and the son.

We believe the simple solution to the pronoun is that He is referring to everybody, but we think it has specific aim at His disciples. He has been on earth with these people for over two years and they still are questioning and criticizing and disbelieving who He is and frankly, He was sick and tired of it. **Thank God He does not give up on His people when they have lapses in their faith. That sure is good for us to know.**

At the end of **verse 19** Jesus said bring the boy to Me.

According to **verse 20**, they brought the boy to Jesus; when the boy saw Jesus, “immediately” the demon threw him into a convulsion and he fell to the ground and began rolling around and foaming at the mouth.

Whenever a demon-possessed person is in the presence of Jesus Christ, things will happen. **Verse 21** is important because He makes his father answer a question as to how long this has been happening. Jesus knew but He wanted this man to publicly say it. He wanted every one of these people—disciples, scribes and crowd—to hear this.

The father said this has been happening from childhood. The Greek words mean this has happened to him since he was very little (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 333). In fact, he adds in **verse 22** that the spirit would often throw him down in a fire or water to kill him. The plural waters probably refer to various lakes and rivers and streams.

Now the father said, “if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us” (v. 22). **Apparently the fact that the disciples could not heal his son caused him to doubt whether or not Jesus could actually help.** When we do not demonstrate a strong faith and confidence in the Lord, we not only hurt ourselves, but also others. For example, if we don’t maintain a strong faith that says Jesus Christ is the only one who can forgive me all my sins, we can stifle the faith of others.

Jesus said to the father in **verse 23**, what do you mean “if you can.” What do you mean if I can, don’t you know who I am? Don’t you realize who you are talking to? There is no “if” about this. **The problem is not if I can do it, the problem is if you believe I can do it.** Certainly I can do this. I can raise dead people.

In fact, Jesus follows that up in **verse 23** by saying, “all things are possible to him who believes.” **In other words, right faith in Jesus Christ and God does not put limits on what God can do.**

Carefully observe that it wasn't the boy's faith in question here, it was the father's faith. Phony faith healers tell people it comes down to the faith of the one who wants to be healed. This had nothing to do with the boy's faith; it had to do with the lack of faith of a father and disciples. Now notice **verse 24**, immediately the boy's father cried out to Jesus I do believe, help my unbelief. This father made a conscious decision to believe in Jesus Christ.

I have heard people say I cannot believe in Jesus Christ. What do you mean you cannot believe in Jesus Christ? The real issue is you will not believe in Jesus Christ. I guarantee you this if you will go to Jesus Christ and say, “I do believe, help my unbelief.” You will see Him do amazing things for you and your life.

(Way of Response #2) - Jesus responds miraculously. 9:25-27

Now as Jesus saw the huge crowd gathering, so He hurries up to heal this boy. If a huge crowd got around Him, they could start a Messianic frenzy and try to prevent Him from going to the cross.

So Jesus quickly rebuked the demon and He said you are a deaf and mute spirit and I command you to come out of him and do not ever enter him again. So this was a case where a demon literally kept a boy from hearing and speaking.

The “I” of **verse 25** is emphatic and it is a divine “I.” What you do learn here about Jesus as God is that He is sovereign over demons. He determines who may be demon-possessed and who may not be demon-possessed. He commanded this demon to come out of the boy and never enter him again. Jesus Christ is completely sovereign over all angels, including demons. He can set you free forever from any demonic thing of which you have ever been involved.

This is a great prayer for any to make—Lord please command that evil, unclean, dirty things will be removed from my life never to return again. Please fill me with your righteousness.

As soon as Jesus commanded this demon, it started crying out and threw him down into terrible convulsions and it left the boy on the ground like he was dead (**v. 26**). **Why did Jesus want this boy to appear to be dead? The answer is to show that He is the only one who can give life to those who are dead in sin.**

It is interesting that the demon cries out because it was this demon that was preventing this boy from speaking. So the demon was not mute.

As the boy was lying there on the ground, **verse 27** says that Jesus took him by the hand and raised him up and he got up.

RESPONSE #3 – Jesus’ disciples respond to Jesus. **9:28-29**

Now after this was all over, Jesus and His disciples went into some house and they began questioning how come they could not take care of the demon:

According to Matthew, they could not do this because they lacked faith and according to Mark they could not do this because they lacked prayer.

Early church fathers added the word “fasting,” but the best manuscripts do not have it.

Jesus says simply, the reason you could not do this was because you did not pray and ask Me. In other words, you guys tried to do this on your own without consulting me or depending on Me.

These disciples are traveling with God who can do anything and they did not ask for His help. They thought the power was in them and it wasn’t. They had faith in themselves, not in the Lord. To accomplish anything, we need a total dependency on the Lord.

Now logically speaking, they could say well you were up on top of the mountain, so how could we get in touch with you? The answer is by prayer. This failure of these disciples was because they were filled up with themselves. They depended on themselves and not the Lord.

Think about this, these disciples had great numbers and what appeared to be great success in ministry. That is what made the religious leaders mad. But they did not have the power of God.

We need to learn an extremely important lesson from this text; we must depend on the Lord and pray to the Lord all the way through life. Only believe that because all things are possible to him who believes.