

AN UNBELIEVING BELIEVER

Mark 9:14-29

Intro: As we move from the glorious experience that the Lord and His disciples had on the mount of transfiguration, to the event presented to us in our text for today, there could hardly be a greater contrast. The Lord and His disciples came from a place where Peter said, “Master [or Rabbi, which was the equivalent of Teacher], “it is good to be here” (v. 5), and they went down from the mount to be confronted again with the tragic results of sin. A great crowd had gathered, and, as usual, the Lord’s enemies were there, the scribes, and they were disputing with the Lord’s disciples.

The account of this incident is found in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, as are the events which preceded this. But Mark gives us more information about what was took place than either Matthew or Luke. And so we are in the best Gospel to get the most information. The Lord asked what the big discussion was about, and it soon became clear. It all had to do with:

I. A DISTRAUGHT FATHER AND HIS DEMON-POSSESSED SON (Mark 4:14-18).

Mark selected one of the most unusual of all of the miracles that our Lord performed while He was here on earth. I don’t know of any other case like this which has been reported in Mark or any of the other three Gospels. There are other cases of demon-possession, but none of a child who was demon-possessed. And when the Lord asked the father how long his son had been in this condition, we see in verse 21 that the father responded, “of a child,” which means from infancy, and possibly even from birth. Luke tells us also that he was this father’s “only child” (Luke 9:38).

We can easily imagine how this man and his wife had looked forward to the birth of their first child, possibly even rejoiced that their first baby was a son, only to have their joy turned into indescribable grief to learn that he was demon-possessed. Matthew (17:15) tells us that this father called his young son, a lunatic. It is hard to know what the father meant. It was thought that one who had lunacy had symptoms which increased as the moon got larger, something like epilepsy. Or the father may have meant that his son was insane. Luke tells us that the father attributed his son’s

trouble to a “spirit,” meaning an evil spirit. It is more in keeping with Scripture to speak of the trouble maker as a demon, one of Satan’s emissaries.

The effect that this demon had upon the boy was dreadful beyond anything that we could imagine. Mark tells us that the father called this demon “a dumb spirit,” not that the spirit was dumb, but that he had made the boy dumb, meaning, unable to talk. The demon’s attacks would come upon the boy suddenly. The father said that the demon would take his son and *tear* him, which means that he would throw the boy into spasms which would seem to tear him apart. He would foam at the mouth, would grind his teeth as though he were being driven mad. And all of this made his body look like it was shriveling up into nothing. Matthew tells us that “often” the boy would fall into a fire or into water when under attack, and the attacks would seem like they would never come to an end. When they did, it was not long until there would be another.

It is hard to think of anything that would cause this boy’s parents greater agony and suffering than to see their boy go through such torture. Obviously the demon was seeking to kill their son, but for some unexpressive reason, he was not able to do it. We know that the Lord was the One Who was preserving the life of the child. It truly was a most terrible situation.

As most of you know, I have been in the ministry many years, but I have never seen a case of demon-possession. I am not saying that the Devil does not work that way today; maybe he does in some parts of the world. I have seen people greatly distress or depressed, but nothing like the description that we have of this boy in the Bible. Instead, I believe that when the Lord came and performed the many miracles that He did, things that we are not seeing today, so the Devil was out in full force to destroy the works of the Lord. and destroying people was a part of his plan. He did all that he could to destroy the Lord. And we have in this incident of the father and his son the extent to which the Devil and his demons would go to ruin people’s lives.

II. THE SITUATION WHICH THE LORD, PETER, JAMES, AND JOHN CAME DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN.

I want you to notice the father, and then I want you to notice the scribes.

Concerning the father, notice what he said to the Lord when the Lord asked what the scribes what questions they were asking the disciples. This is verses 14 and 16. The father's words to the Lord are given in verses 17 and 18. (Read.) The father had probably been looking for the Lord, but when he couldn't find the Lord, he appealed to the disciples to help him. But "they could not."

Now it was very reasonable that the father would appeal to the disciples because he had evidently heard that they had cast demons out of other people. In Mark 6:7 we read these words, speaking of what the Lord had done earlier:

7 And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits.

In Matthew's account of the Lord sending out the twelve, He said to them as He commissioned them: "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons" (Matt. 10:8a). And we can sure that they did all of these miracles. So the father of our little boy had known what the disciples had done, and came to them expecting that they could help his son, and deliver him from this dumb spirit.

But "they could not"! I want to come back to this a little later. But this all led to a greater disappointment to the father. It really dashed his hopes *until* the Lord came down from the mount, and the father went directly to the Lord. Mark gave us the father's appeal to the Lord. We have it in two places in our text. In verse 17 he said, "Master, I have brought to thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit." Then he told the Lord what the demon did to his son, and that the disciples were not able to help them. And then in verse 22 we read these words:

22 And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if Thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.

In Matthew 17:15 we read these words from the father:

15 Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatic, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.

Luke, in 9:38 and 39, said that the Father spoke these words:

38 And, behold, a man of the company cried out, saying, Master, I beseech Thee, look upon my son: for he is mine only child.

39 And, lo, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly crieth out; and it teareth him that he foameth again, and bruising him hardly departeth from him.

"Hardly" means *hardly ever*, or *scarcely ever*. It seemed to the father that

one attack followed closely on the previous attack.

So the father was desperate. The Lord was his last and only hope. But it showed evidence of his faith that he had come to the Lord.

But what about the scribes? We are not told exactly, but although they probably did not like to see this little boy suffer, yet it appeared like a victory for them that the disciples had failed to provide help in this time of need.

Now we are ready to see what happened.

III. WHAT DID THE LORD DO?

He did three things: He issued a rebuke; He delivered the demon-possessed boy; and He answered His disciples' question.

To whom did the Lord direct His rebuke? All three, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, record the rebuke. You find it here in Mark 8:19, in Matthew 17:17, and in Luke 9:41. To whom did the Lord say these words? Those who have written on the Gospels differ widely in their response. Personally I would excuse the father and his tormented son. He had come to the Lord, and although his faith had been severely shaken by the failure of the disciples, yet he did not give up, but quickly came to the Lord when the Lord with Peter, James, and John appeared, having come down from the mount.

Those that fit the description given in the rebuke, a "faithless and perverse generation," applied more to the scribes than anyone else. The Lord knew their hearts and those nothing would convince them that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah. And the Lord's patience was being tried to the limit by their unrelenting opposition.

But it seems that the disciples, humiliated by their own failure, took the Lord's rebuke to heart. And we see this by their appeal to Him which we will get to in just a moment. But the father seems to have taken the rebuke to himself, and we see in verse 23 what the Lord said to him after his appeal for the Lord to have compassion on them, both the father and the son. And this is when the father of the boy cried out, and with tears, said those now famous words, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." He believed that the Lord could, but he did not know if He would.

Haven't you ever felt that way? You have prayed and prayed and prayed about some matter, and yet no answer has come. You know that the Lord does hear you, and can answer, but you are not sure if He will, or not. And so your doubts begin to attack your faith. Yet the Lord brought the father to this place in his prayers for his son in order that, when the blessing came, as it did, the father would give all of the glory to the Lord. He knew that he did not deserve such a blessing, and that is why he had asked the Lord to have compassion upon them, and to heal his son.

Mark gives us more details about the healing than either Matthew or Luke. (Read verses 25-27.)

This passage gives us some important truth concerning the Devil and his demons. They are all fallen angels who rebelled against God before Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. And it was the Devil who tempted them to do what the Lord God had told them not to do. And the evidence of spiritual death has been evident on this earth from that day until this. Disease and death, physical death, are a part of the curse of God upon mankind because of Adam's sin in the beginning. And with sin came not only physical death, but spiritual death, and ultimately eternal death. Hell was prepared for the Devil and his demons, not for human beings. Man's contentment to live without God, is evidence of spiritual death. And Paul told the Corinthian church that "the god of this world," the Devil," hath blinded the minds of them who believe not to keep them from hearing and understanding the Gospel, which is the only way of escape from hell. He was out to kill that little boy, and his father too, before they could come into contact with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Devil and his demons are in constant warfare against the whole human race. This little boy that we have been thinking about, is an example of the limits to which they will go to keep even children from meeting and trusting in Christ. If you want to learn about the Devil, read the Bible. That is where you will get the truth about him, and learn what a vicious enemy he is, and the demons are, in their opposition to God and to all that is holy and just and good.

But I still have not completed dealing with my text. That which remains has to do with the Lord and His disciples. It is to God's glory that they came to the Lord, asking about the demon, and saying to the Lord, "Why could we not cast him out?" They had been given that power, as we have seen in Mark and Matthew. Why did they fail? What was the Lord's answer?

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The answer is in verse 29 of Mark 9: “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.

Some of you may have a translation which omits the word fasting altogether because some MSS do not have it. If you are using the NASB and read Matthew’s account, you will see that they take this verse out altogether. But Matthew includes a statement that neither Mark or Luke have. He says that the Lord responded by saying this:

20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you (Matt. 17:20).

I think that the Lord made both of these statements, and that He probably spoke of fasting too. You know that fasting is going without food for the purpose of taking added time for fellowship with the Lord in prayer. You can fast for a day, or you can fast for only a meal. We all like to eat, and most of us probably eat too much. But sometimes when you are facing a great need in your life, fasting gives you time to pray that you would otherwise spend in eating.

But apart from what the Lord said about fasting, how are we to bring together the disciples need for prayer and for faith. Because in prayer we are to pray in faith, and our faith is always strengthened by prayer. In prayer we are like the father of this boy who came to the Lord seeking help from him, praying because we know that the Lord is the only One Who can help us and meet our needs, or the needs of those for whom we pray.

Concl: Do you suppose that the disciples had gotten so busy serving the

Lord, or doing other things, that they had neglected prayer, had not sought the blessing of the Lord as they needed to. Giving the disciples the gift of healing did not mean that they could heal without trusting the Lord. I am sure that this past week has been a busy week for all of us. And next week will probably be the same. If you plan to pray after you get everything else done, you will never pray. And the Lord’s blessing will not be upon you. You can be the most gifted person on the face of the earth, but if you neglect the Lord, you can easily become “a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.” But if you pray because you love the Lord, and want to be with Him, it will be amazing to you to see how the Lord will bless you and use you. The disciples were neglecting prayer, and consequently their faith suffered. Get back to prayer, and at times to fasting, if only for a meal, and see how your faith will be strengthened and how you will grow.