

“All Things Are Possible”
The Gospel According to Mark 9:14-29

June 3rd, 2018

After writing his gospel account, Mark traveled, sowing the seeds of the Christian faith throughout Northern Africa and Egypt, and finally settled in Alexandria and established a church there.

On April 21st, AD 64, Mark preached a sermon remembering the suffering and death of Christ as part of Easter Sunday. He had been at odds with the local heathen priests, and they took this day to incite the general population to rise up against him.

The rebels stormed the church and seized Mark. Using hooks and ropes, they dragged him out through the congregation, into the streets and out of the city. He left a trail of blood and flesh that stained the rocks over which they dragged him. Blood flowed from virtually every spot on his body as the mob jeered and mocked him. With his last words, he commended his spirit into the hands of Jesus and died.

Even with Mark’s death, the crowd’s thirst for violence was not satisfied, and the priests called for his body to be burned instead of buried. Suddenly, a storm erupted, scattering the mob in every direction, and Mark’s body was left where he had died. A crowd of Christians then came and took the body and gave Mark a proper burial.

For sure, Mark had witnessed the kind of persecution Jesus endured. Mark was Peter’s co-worker and disciple, and as such, would have witnessed much of what took place in Jesus’ life. Though Mark was beloved by the Lord and useful in gospel ministry, his life came to an end in a painful, inhuman way, much the same as did His Master, Jesus.

We’re deep into the 9th chapter of Mark’s gospel account in our weekly sermon study of the New Testament Book bearing Mark’s name. What takes place in today’s text comes on the heels of the glorious transfiguration of Jesus on the Mount with His three closest disciples – Peter, James, and John. As we hear God speak to us by His Spirit in His Word – **Mark Chapter 9:14-29** – imagine what it must’ve been like for them to have glimpsed the glory of heaven, to have that followed up with an argument among the other disciples and the scribes.

The Gospel According to Mark 9:14-29:

¹⁴ And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them. ¹⁵ Immediately, when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running to *Him*, greeted Him. ¹⁶ And He asked the scribes, “What are you discussing with them?”

¹⁷ Then one of the crowd answered and said, “Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit.

¹⁸ And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not.”

¹⁹ He answered him and said, “O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me.” ²⁰ Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth.

²¹ So He asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?”

And he said, “From childhood. ²² And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”

²³ Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things *are* possible to him who believes.”

²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”

²⁵ When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!” ²⁶ Then *the spirit* cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, “He is dead.” ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

²⁸ And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?”

²⁹ So He said to them, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.”

MP 1 – Disciples’ Failure (v. 14-18);

MP 2 – Jesus’ Frustration (v. 19-29);

MP 3 – Our Faith – the absolute need for it!

Jesus noticed an argument taking place among some priests and the 9 disciples who did not accompany Him, Peter, James, and John up the mountain. Jesus asked the priests what they were discussing with His disciples. A reply didn’t come from the priests or disciples; rather a voice came from among the crowd gathered round.

It was a man who had brought his son to Jesus for healing. But, Jesus was up on the mountain when the two arrived, so the man asked the disciples who weren’t with Jesus to heal his son. The man’s son was a deaf mute; he couldn’t hear, nor could he speak. Furthermore, he was prone to epileptic seizures, the grand mal variety. Worse than any of that, he was a demoniac, his grievous physical condition brought about by an unclean spirit. This we know because the boy was convulsed at the very moment when the demon saw Jesus. Furthermore, according to Luke’s account, this was the man’s only son (**Luke 9:38**).

The man said he spoke with Jesus’ disciples who in turn, when trying to cast out the demon, as they had done previously after Jesus had sent them out to conduct ministry among the peoples, could not rid the boy of the demon. **Jesus’ disciples had failed!** We can get a taste of this father’s grief, distress, and hopelessness. Nothing had worked, not even the ministry of Jesus’ disciples could free his son! *What other possibility was there to help comfort his troubled son?*

His Help was in the name of the Lord who made the heavens and the earth, and was standing right in front of him! All things are possible to him who believes!

Even as we can get a taste of the father’s futility, we can also relate to **the frustration Jesus** must’ve had with the ministerial inability of His disciples! Jesus’ frustration is apparent in the questions He poses to them in verse 19 – “O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?” Right about that time, you can sense the disciples were squirming where they stood looking for something to hide behind! They would have been shamed by Jesus’ rebuke!

There is Old Testament precedent to this ministerial frustration Jesus experienced. In the 19th chapter of the Bible’s second book, Exodus, Moses went up Mount Sinai to receive God’s instructions for His people. While Moses was up the mountain (as recorded 13 chapters later – **Exodus 32**) the sounds of partying at the bottom of the mountain filled his ears. The Israelites had come to Moses’ brother Aaron thinking Moses wasn’t coming back, so Aaron instructed them to gather up all their gold and they made a golden calf saying, “This is your god, O Israel, that

brought you out of the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 32:4) Moses was more than a little frustrated when he went back down the mountain. Exodus 32:19-20 put it this way – “...Moses’ anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. Then (Moses) took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it.”

“Let us learn a lesson of humility from the failure of the disciples. Let us strive to realize every day our need of the grace and presence of Christ. Without Him we can do nothing at all. With Him we may overcome the greatest temptations. Without Him the least may overcome us. Let our cry be every morning, “leave us not to ourselves – we know not what a day may bring forth.” (Ryle, 182)

Jesus called for the boy, who was brought to Him. He asked the father how long his son had been thus afflicted. Of course, Jesus, as God, knew the answer was “from childhood,” but He was preparing those around Him to see the great and immediate power of God in solving human suffering after much time and prescriptions had failed to bring relief.

This is evident in the man’s words in verse 22 – “And often he (the demon) has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” Ah, there is the glimpse of faith for which Jesus was looking, but it was very weak. Jesus’ response is in verse 23, “If you can believe, all things *are* possible to him who believes.”

Commentator Kent Hughes calls this “one of the most abused verses in the Bible today.” (Hughes, 25) People have ripped it from its context and made it the rationale for saying that their wishes will come true if they can just mount enough faith. There are some who even teach that if you believe enough, God *has* to do it! That is man-made, man-centered religion. It smells like smoke and comes from the pit of hell!

Jesus wanted the blessing this family was about to receive to be experienced in the context of personal trust in Him and love for Him. Buoyed by Jesus’ words, the man sputtered, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” So, Jesus commanded the evil spirit to leave the boy, and it did with much violent pomp and circumstance. All who witnessed thought the boy to be dead. But, Jesus took the boy’s hand and lifted up to life.

So, what does Jesus mean when He says, “all things are possible to him who believes?”

“Faith is man in his weakness trusting God’s promise in His word. Only through such weakness is the strength of God seen.” (Ferguson, 145) Therein lies our hope. One commentator on this text notes, “The emphasis is not on the quality of our faith but on the power of the Master with whom we are joined by faith.” (English, 168)

A Little Leaguer was playing the outfield in the first game of the season. After chasing a long hit and hustling the ball back into the infield, someone asked him how his team was doing and what the score was. The boy said his team was doing OK, but they were losing 17-0.

The bystander asked the boy if he was discouraged being behind so far, and if he was ready to admit defeat. He came back with this retort – “We aren’t beaten; we haven’t even been up to bat yet!”

Faith is vital in our walk with Jesus. We have good reason for confidence because God is in heaven and all power rests in him. All things are possible to him who believes!

The last two verses of our text show Jesus alone with His disciples in a house. Perplexed by their inability, they ask him, “Why could we not cast it out?” Jesus’ brief reply - “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.”

A true test of our spiritual walk, dear ones, is our prayer life. *Are you a person of faith who works out that faith by storming heaven’s gates with your prayers and petitions?* We must be people of profound prayer if we believe in the Christ of this chapter. Great things would be taking place if we would just pray for them; salvation of whole peoples and nations; revivals, power in the Church!

William Hendriksen notes, “Where there is little faith, there is little prayer.” (Hendriksen, 351) Beloved, if you find prayer difficult, it could be that you have shriveled, impoverished, malnourished faith! The disciples had failed to heal this boy of his demon because they had not acted in prayer and sincere faith. They were relying in their own power and strength. This was a form of unbelief because it encouraged them to trust in themselves rather than in God! “To pray is to totally give the situation over to God, allowing His power to redeem the situation.” (Card, 120)

MP 1 – Disciples’ Failure (v. 14-18);

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When Stenley got off the boat on a remote Indonesian island, he felt the spiritual darkness. The locals practiced a combination of witchcraft and Islam. Stenley was fresh out of Bible College and ready for the work to which God had called him, reaching these island people for Christ.

Stenley preached boldly, calling people to turn to Christ and then to burn their idols and the relics of their old life. One Muslim burned his idol, but inside it was a scroll from the Koran. When radical Muslims heard of the burning of the Koran, they reported Stenley to area officials. Stenley was immediately arrested.

Although Stenley was horribly beaten and lay comatose, his mentor from Bible College, Pastor Siwi, came to see him and witnessed tears streaming from his eyes. Soon after, Stenley died from his injuries.

But even death could not end Stenley’s ministry. When his story was told in his home village, 11 Muslims surrendered to Christ as Savior. Another 53 villagers decided to attend Bible College, 7 of whom asked to be sent as missionaries to the very village where Stenley had died.

Hoping to extinguish the gospel fire, village officials snuffed out Stenley’s life. But even in the midst of their violence, God was at work. Today the flames of the gospel burn brightly in that village. All things are possible to him who believes!