

**Mark 9:14-29**  
**April 11, 2010**  
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**EXHORDIUM**

Mark 9 is an interesting chapter. It almost looks as if memories were haphazardly strung together.

First we have the transfiguration as Jesus is prepared for death and His clothes are made a dazzling white. Next, a young lad is possessed with a demon that makes him unable to hear our speak. After this, Jesus again reminds the disciples that He goes to Jerusalem to die. This time, He does so in very clear terms. Next, the disciples dispute who is the greatest among them. Then Jesus takes a little child and puts him in their midst. He tells how we are to be like children. Then the disciples complain of a disciple who was not traveling with them but who was casting out demons in the name of Jesus. Jesus tells them to leave him alone and then tells the parable about plucking out our own offending eye or cutting off our own offending hands.

This is quite a narrative. It is too much to preach through in one sermon so we will make our way through it carefully. But we should not assume that these are random unrelated stories thrown together in a stream of consciousness. Mark has crafted a brilliant book and it speaks to us at many levels. Mark uses unbelievers and even demons to teach the disciples what they need to hear. And since he does so, I hope that his book will also open our deaf ears and give speech to our dumb tongues.

Today, we will deal with the story of the demoniac child. But as we do so, keep the larger context in mind. Jesus is systematically revealing to the disciples who He is and what He plans to do. We read this book with hind sight, just as the author wrote it and we wonder how the disciples could possibly have been so dense. But we, too, have a hard time seeing what the Lord is doing in our own lives. We say that we know the Lord but then we are sometimes completely befuddled by the things that He does in our lives.

This ought not to surprise us. After all, we are not God and His ways are not our ways. However, we should be growing in grace and wisdom. One of the things I hope we develop from Mark is that Jesus has quite a different agenda than those around Him. Because their agenda is different, this prevents the disciples from seeing the obvious.

Our challenge is similar. If our agenda is different than the Lord's agenda, then we will not see the obvious. Life will always surprise us and as a

result we will be continually disappointed in Jesus. But if we approach life like a child cited the first catechism, our agenda will change and we will not only be able to submit to the Lord's will but we will also be able to rejoice in it.

There is a real boy here who is possessed of a devil. We should have compassion for him and his father. We should desire for the demon to be gone and for the boy to be set free. The scribes could not remove the demon but neither could the disciples of Jesus. This is odd given the fact that Jesus has already given them authority over demons.

What is going on here? Why are they this far along in their ministry and are now completely stumped as to what to do? They cannot even stand up to the scribes questions.

## EXEGESIS

**And when he came to *his* disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. <sup>15</sup>And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to *him* saluted him.**

Keep in mind the ongoing context about the envy that Jesus provokes. He continues to serve the people, heal, cast out demons, accurately teach the Word of God. All of these good things cause the crowds to be amazed at Him but it causes the Scribes and Pharisees to hate Him.

And this kind of envy is not only rampant among the Scribes and Pharisees, it is also rampant among the very disciples and even the Apostles of Jesus. We should expect this sort of behavior from the enemies of Christ but we would hope better about the behavior of the friends of Christ.

This is a chronic problem. The friends of Jesus keep acting like His enemies. Those in the Kingdom of God keep acting like those ruled by the power of Satan. Although they should be the ones who have ears to hear and mouths to proclaim the Gospel, their ears are stopped up and their mouths are quiet.

The people salute Jesus. They greet Him. They give Him honor. This infuriates the Scribes. The people run to Jesus for answers and for blessings. The Scribes are the ones who ought to give these answers. But the kinds of problems that are being presented are beyond their ability to find a solution.

**<sup>16</sup>And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them?**

Apparently the Scribes were questioning the disciples about the deaf and dumb boy. They knew that they could not heal him but the disciples could not heal him either. No doubt this gave the Scribes great joy. For if they could not

heal the boy, the only thing that would make them happier is that the boy could also not be healed by the disciples. What is wrong with this picture? There was no concern for the boy. The Scribes want to have a theological dispute with the disciples. Upon what basis does your authority lie? Why will this spirit not obey you? Your authority is no greater than our authority, etc.

As we make our way through this chapter, we will see that the Apostles act just like this. They have the same sort of questions for one another. They are all trying to muscle their way into the kingdom of God. But Jesus is teaching that muscling in is not the way to advance in His Kingdom.

**<sup>17</sup>And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; <sup>18</sup>And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.**

Jesus shows up and the man appeals directly to Jesus. He knows that the scribes cannot help him. He has found out that the disciples cannot help him. And so now he appeals directly to the Lord. Only the Lord can make this boy hear and speak.

The spirit hear is called a dumb spirit. Jesus speaks to the spirit as deaf and dumb. We should not think that spirit itself cannot speak or hear. But it has that power on the boy. It causes him to be unable to hear and unable to speak.

When one is controlled by the power of a demon, one is unable to hear the Word of God or speak the truth.

We know that Jesus is speaking to faithless Israel through these encounters. The Scribes and Pharisees are their representatives. They are like this boy, possessed by a devil. They should see, hear and speak the Word of God. They were entrusted with this task. But for many years now, they have ceased to speak the truth or listen to the voice of God. They need Jesus but they will not appeal to Him. They are themselves deaf and dumb, as well as blind, but they will not seek the remedy that God offers. They will not humble themselves and embrace God's Messiah. Consequently, they remain deaf, dumb and blind.

But it is not just the enemies of the gospel that suffer this same malady. This boy is brought to the disciples and they cannot cast out the demon. Previously in Mark, Jesus has given the disciples authority to cast out demons and to heal. But now, they are unable to do so. They look upon the boy and are unable to do that which the Lord has commanded them to do. What is going on?

Remember in our previous chapter when the blind man was healed and saw men walking about like trees? He was healed, sort of, but needed another touch by Jesus. He began to see but He didn't really see clearly. He could see the

shapes of things. He could see types and shadows of things but He could not see things as they really were. It is interesting that we are told that the Old Testament is given to us in types and shadows. We can see that. Even the Scribes and Pharisees could see that. But when the real thing was in their midst, they could not see it.

The Pharisees and Scribes are blind Israel. But the disciples, themselves, are like the man half healed. They see but not distinctly. They have seen types and shadows but they are still not hearing Jesus or speaking His Words in truth. Remember Peter. He confessed that Jesus was Lord and Messiah only to go back to devil talk. He sees who Jesus is but is still unable to clearly hear His voice or adequately speak the Lord's Words.

So, not only is unbelieving Israel represented in this story, so is half believing Israel, the disciples and the apostles. Only when they finally forsake their ways, their own ambitions, their own desires, will they be able to hear and speak the truth.

**<sup>19</sup>He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.**

Who is the faithless generation? Clearly, it is that generation that will not receive the Messiah. Judgment is going to fall on them. But they are not the only faithless generation. Children do not become faithless without some help from their parents. There is a cause and effect here that cannot be mistaken. One does not simply wake up without faith. It takes a waning before all the shine is gone from the moon. Israel has suffered by degrees. Their teachers have failed to teach the Word of God. The leaders have sought out their own advancement. The people have been willing to hear less and less truth until they were unable to hear at all.

Who is the faithless generation? How about the Scribes and Pharisees for starters? How about the disciples for second? How about the man with the young boy for third. And how about the boy, himself. Faithlessness has a trajectory. It produces poor fruit and eventually no fruit, like the cursed fig tree.

But there is hope for those whose faith is faint or waning. Jesus is the Lord of Resurrection. He not only curses faithless Israel. He also prunes faithful Israel. His pruning is painful but it produces fruit, some thirty, some sixty and some a hundred fold.

**<sup>20</sup>And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed**

**foaming. <sup>21</sup>And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. <sup>22</sup>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.**

The boy is brought to Jesus. Again, we might point out that this boy is exhibiting no faith. He is so far gone that not only does he not exhibit faith, he recoils at the very sight of Jesus. He is so controlled of the devil that he cannot even stand to be in the presence of Jesus Christ. This is the power of Christ, that devils do not even want to be near him. They do not mind being near the Scribes and Pharisees or even dwelling in the temple. And when the disciples are not exhibiting faith, they don't even mind dwelling near them. But to be near Christ is more than they can bear.

This boy has been bothered by this demon since the boy was a child. His disease is of a long standing. It has almost killed him on many occasions, casting him into fire to burn him and water to drown him. The demon knows that it must go. Of all the people represented here, the demon knows who Jesus is and what His proper authority is. But knowing this does not make the demon submit to Jesus as an act of worship. It resists Jesus and continues to do harm to those that Jesus would help. But Jesus cuts short the time of the demon.

The father is complicit in the ill health of the son. We have of his own mouth, a weak testimony of faith. He is a believer but a weak and struggling one.

He asks if the Lord can do anything. This is not the same as asking if the Lord will do something. The Lord can do anything that is consistent with His character. He has the power. He has the power over the devil, over sickness, even over death. The Lord can do this. The man is expressing some doubt about Jesus based upon the inability of Jesus's disciples to deal with the devil. The disciples have the same kind of faith that this man has. They have faith but they also are struggling with unbelief. They are wondering what Jesus can do. They do not simply submit to whatever He will do.

The man asks Jesus to have compassion on them and help them. Jesus does have compassion on the man and his son and He does help them. He can and He will.

**<sup>23</sup>Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things *are* possible to him that believeth. <sup>24</sup>And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.**

The man says, "Jesus, if you can, please help." Jesus says, "If you can believe, then I will help."

**All things are possible to him that believes.** We have spoken before about how Jesus makes a distinction between His disciples and His enemies. Here is the distinction. The disciples believe. The enemies will not believe. And if they do not believe, Jesus will not help them.

The man believes but is scared about his unbelief. Jesus does not require him to believe more before he helps him. The man believes, if only a little bit. Perhaps his faith is only as big as a grain of mustard seed. Jesus helps him in his unbelief. He casts out the demon.

**<sup>25</sup>When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, *Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him.* <sup>26</sup>And *the spirit* cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, **He is dead.****

Jesus wanted to get this done before the people's running caused a riot. So, He finishes up with the demon by speaking with authority. He commands the demon to leave the boy and never enter into him again.

The demon goes but not without a fight. He seemingly kills the boy before he goes out of him. That is how hard it is to get Satan out of unbelief. But what is seeming dead is not dead. At least not where there is Resurrection life. And Jesus is that Resurrection life.

Israel is seeming dead but can be revived through the Messiah.

**<sup>27</sup>But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.**

Up from the grave he arose with a mighty triumph over His foes. What is dead by the hand of demons is alive by the hand of Christ.

**<sup>28</sup>And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, **Why could not we cast him out?** <sup>29</sup>And he said unto them, **This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.****

The disciples are like the man. They believe but they need help in their unbelief. Jesus has given them authority over demons, to cast them out in His name. But this takes faith. They do not have this power of their own authority. As soon as they try to take control of their own authority, their faith grows weak and they cannot fight the world, the flesh or the devil. They must pray to Christ and fast from their own ways. They must submit to Him, forsaking their own ways. They must have the compassion of Christ and serve those who are weaker than themselves.

In short, they must forsake their own worldly way, the way of Satan and take up the way of Christ, the way of the cross. When they do this, the demons will shudder.

### **EXHORTATION**

The Lord is doing something magnificent in our lives, in our church, in our homes. He has touched us and given us the ability to see. But our sight is sometimes weak. We need touched again and again by Jesus. Our faith is weak and we sometimes choose the way of the devil, rather than the way of Christ, the way of the cross. In our own flesh, who would choose the way of suffering over the way of ruling and power? But Jesus teaches that His way is the way of service, the way of suffering. Only when the demons of self-promotion are cast out and killed, will the Lord be able to raise us to the kind of life that He gives us. This seems counter to our inclinations. We think that when we give up our wills, we give up our freedom. On Earth, that is true. But in Heaven, the opposite is true. When we give up our wills to the Lord, He grants us freedom. And Heaven has broken into Earth, so let all those who would be free, give up to Jesus. Take His will upon you and you shall be free. Stop striving for the mastery over your brothers and sisters, whether in your home, in your church, in your workplace. Seek to honor the Lord, first. When you lay yourself down, even as if you were dead, only then can the Lord raise you up. But this is the way of Christ, the way of the cross. To men, foolishness but to those who are being saved, it is the wisdom of God.