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SERMON TITLE: **When Your Faith is Not Enough!**
SCRIPTURE: **Mark 9:14-29**
DATE: **February 13, 2022**
Online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also Psalm 89:6-18. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

The Christian lifestyle carries tensions in several areas. When I say “carries tensions” it means those things we struggle to understand, for example between “having faith” and conforming to religious rules. Then there’s the question, who is Jesus, exactly? Simply a good moral teacher? Jeff taught last week that Jesus holds the offices of king, priest, and prophet. As such, Jesus is the Son of God.

If Jesus is the Son of God, then Jesus takes priority in our lives. We are learning from Mark’s Gospel how to do that, just like his disciples.

Remember how Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a mountain where Jesus was transformed. However, neither they nor we can stay on the mountain. When they came down reality hit quickly. Let’s read it. READ Mark 9:14-29

This is everyday life. Lest you think that the spiritual realm is not that real, or evil is not a real threat, this passage shows demonic activity. Sometimes our problem consists of a disease. Sometimes it is mental illness. This story describes the problem as demonic oppression.

Before you dismiss this story, Dr. Richard Gallagher, a professor of clinical psychiatry at New York Medical College, has made it his life’s work to identify diabolic possessions. He has written a book distinguishing demonic possessions from mental or physical illnesses. While uncommon, demon possessions are discernable and destructive.¹

The disciples could not cast out the demon from the boy. This is what caused the arguments.

Can you imagine the conversation: “What you guys are doing is just hocus pocus. There’s no power in the name of Jesus. That’s ridiculous. Leave it alone. What is this you’re doing? Some kind of holy rolling show?” And the power struggle begins.

This event caused all kinds of mixed feelings about healing. And then to top it off, Jesus said, *anything is possible with faith; with prayer*. Sometimes his words can be so exasperating! ☐

What if we were arguing with each other about this subject? What if we were at such differences that when Jesus showed up, we just continued arguing. Can you see him saying, “What a generation! No sense of God! How many times do I have to go over these things?” How much longer do I have to put up with this?” (Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*)

It is easy to see this scenario. Jesus shows up and they did not notice because of their confusion. It is understandable because there’s tension between faith and healing.

But the father whose son is suffering understands the problem. He begs, “*If you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.*” Well, that got a rise out of Jesus!

“*If you are able! – All things can be done for the one who believes.*”

To that the man immediately shouted the most beautiful sentence in all of the Bible: “**I believe! Help my unbelief!**”

The father was the only one who acknowledges his weakness. Notice, Jesus did not reply to him “get your faith up to par and I will help you.” Or, “confess all your sins, get rid of all your doubts, surrender to me totally, and then I will heal your boy.” No! The man humbled himself—I don’t have enough faith or strength of moral character to believe like I should! And immediately Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit.

That’s what real faith is all about.

We must realize the threat of Satan and his forces of evil. Remember how Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert. Remember, in Ephesians we learn to overcome the devil with prayer and having faith. This is the way to learn to stand strong.

If we are facing a problem, what helps us overcome unbelief? We must strengthen our faith.

Jesus said “You faithless generation.” Well, let’s strengthen our faith.

¹ Richard Gallagher, “As a Psychiatrist, I Diagnose Mental Illness. Also, I Help Spot Demonic Possession.” How a scientist learned to work with exorcists. The Washington Post, July 1, 2016, at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/07/01/as-a-psychiatrist-i-diagnose-mental-illness->

and-sometimes-demonic-possession/, accessed February 8, 2022. Dr. Gallagher is also a psychoanalyst on the faculty at Columbia University. He has devoted many years to distinguishing the rare cases of overt demonic attacks from the more common conditions of medical and psychiatric disorders.

The word for faithless in Greek is **ἄπιστος** (Mk 9:19). It means “without trust or confidence,” unreliable, untrustworthy — sometimes it has the implication “to refuse to believe.”

When the answer did not come, the crowd refused to believe. They argued about it.

To have faith, **πιστος**, in the Lord is to believe in his fidelity, his reliability, or have certainty in general. The word has a nuance of being obedient, as in a marital contract. Trust his faithfulness. To have faith is “to believe God’s words” (in the prophets, in Moses’s writings; and what God is saying at the moment, e.g., through an angel).²

Lord, help my unbelief!

Let’s look at the bigness of God as found in Psalm 89:

- Highest angels stand in awe – God is far more awesome, mightier
- Entirely faithful
 - Rules the oceans; subdue storm-tossed waves; crushed the sea monster
- Scattered his enemies
- Created all - owns heavens, earth, everything in the world
 - Created north and south
- Powerful
- Strong
 - Rules with righteous, justice, unending love, truth
- Is pleased to make us strong
- Protects us
- HAS GIVEN US KING JESUS

Jesus said, “This kind only comes out by prayer.” This means **devoted connection**. When you pray for someone, take these words and repeat them.

You are seeing the greatness of your problem. Let’s acknowledge the problem, but see the greatness of God.

Do you have times when you cannot sleep because your problem is looming so large? Get up and turn to your One-Year Bible and read that day’s passage. Tell the Lord: “I am only seeing the greatness of my problem. Please show me Your Greatness and Love.” Here is how believers respond to God’s greatness in Psalm 89:

- They happily respond to the call to worship;
- walk in the light of God’s presence;
- rejoice in God’s wonderful reputation;
- exult in God’s righteousness
- stand in God’s glorious strength

But the believers in the story answered NOT by praying, NOT by recognizing the greatness of God, but by getting into a religious argument.

How great is God to you? How will you respond to God’s greatness?

Respond in worship. When your faith is not enough, remember that the Lord is faithful. Jesus said all of this to that group of believers when he himself was facing the cross. He himself would face a great big “NO” in answer to his prayer in Gethsemane. But he said, “I trust you, Lord.” “I trust your will and your plan, even though it feels impossible.”

There is no greater victory than Jesus’ resurrection. The boy who suffered from demonic possession was released.

Jesus will always release us from any darkness—Do you want to faithfully stick with him, and grow out of unbelief? Let us become more and more faithful!

AMEN

MARK 9:14-29

¹⁴ When they returned to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd surrounding them, and some teachers of religious law were arguing with them. ¹⁵ When the crowd saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with awe, and they ran to greet him. ¹⁶ “What is all this arguing about?” Jesus asked. ¹⁷ One of the men in the crowd spoke up and said, “Teacher, I brought my son so you could heal him. He is possessed by an evil spirit that won’t let him talk. ¹⁸ And whenever this spirit seizes him, it throws him violently to the ground. Then he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn’t do it.”

¹⁹ Jesus said to them, “You faithless people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.” ²⁰ So they brought the boy. But when the evil spirit saw Jesus, it threw the child into a violent convulsion, and he fell to the ground, writhing and foaming at the mouth. ²¹ “How long has this been happening?” Jesus asked the boy’s father. He replied, “Since he was a little boy. ²² The spirit often throws him into the fire or into water, trying to kill him. Have mercy on us and help us, if you can.” ²³ “What do you mean, ‘If I can?’” Jesus asked. “Anything is possible if a person believes.” ²⁴ The father instantly cried out, “I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!”

²⁵ When Jesus saw that the crowd of onlookers was growing, he rebuked the evil spirit. “Listen, you spirit that makes this boy unable to hear and speak,” he said. “I command you to come out of this child and never enter him again!” ²⁶ Then the spirit screamed and threw the boy into another violent convulsion and left him. The boy appeared to be dead. A murmur ran through the crowd as people said, “He’s dead.” ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him to his feet, and he stood up.

²⁸ Afterward, when Jesus was alone in the house with his disciples, they asked him, “Why couldn’t we cast out that evil spirit?” ²⁹ Jesus replied, “This kind can be cast out only by prayer.”

² Bultmann, “πιστος,” in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. VI, p. 205.