

Prayer **Mark 9:14-29**

Jesus comes off the mountain of transfiguration where he was glorified, encouraged by Moses and Elijah, and honored by the Father (9:2-8). What does he find? A great crowd watching the scribes argue with his disciples because they can't heal a boy with an unclean spirit (vv14, 18). Jesus comes down from a mountaintop experience to find things much as he left them. But this is why he went up in the first place: to prepare for his mission to Jerusalem. Jesus encounters frustratingly faithless people in this passage. He shows us how to be faithful in the midst of faithlessness. Not all problems are equally difficult, and some like this one require far more prayer than others (v29). Prayers teaches us to be properly dependent upon God and at the same time accomplishes the great things he has called us to.

Prayer Reveals Our Dependence

All the parties in this scene are helpless! The disciples fail, the scribes argue, and the crowd watches. No one is looking for Jesus, although the crowds run to him once they see him (v15). The only decisive agent appears to be the unclean spirit who wretchedly seizes the boy and throws him down where he grinds his death and becomes deathly rigid (v18). This has been happening since childhood, often throwing him into fire and water to kill him (vv21-22). It's unnecessary to link all physical maladies to spiritual possession, but important to see the connection between the Devil and death—He loves it (Prov. 8:36). We are supposed to be horrified by it and ready and willing to do all in our power to combat it. The disciples quickly forgot the source of their previous success, and when this spirit doesn't come out like the others, they are easily distracted (v18; cf. 3:15; 6:7). "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer" (v29). We tend to think, "Has it come to that?" We should be consistent in prayer for big and small things. Henri Nouwen says prayer is "a way of being empty and useless in the presence of God and so of proclaiming our basic belief that all is grace and nothing is simply the result of hard work." God gives us the Lord's Prayer to make us mindful of our dependence on him. The disciples are supposed to be at a loss, and therefore praying (cf. Lk. 18:1-8). Paul Miller: "Learned desperation is at the heart of a praying life."

Prayer Reveals Our Power

This was not an easy healing, but Jesus doesn't show the disciples or the father a lot of verbal sympathy: "O faithless generation, how long am I going to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me" (v19). The father's request is despondent: "But if you can do anything..." (v22). Jesus' response is hopeful: "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes" (v23). The disciples have the power and responsibility to help and they don't. The father has the means of healing right in front of him and he is doubting and cynical. Because Jesus cares and wants to see the boy healed, he is annoyed at their lack of faith and action. This is being righteously annoyed. It bothers God when we tap out at the first sign of resistance, when we fail to even try because we are too cynical, or when we fail to use the gifts he has given us to serve others. Jesus lays out the right approach: "All things are possible for him who believes." This is not "you never know" ambiguity or "all things are certain for the one who believes so name it, claim it." This is faith that God can do anything and will answer prayer one way or the other. The father believes this and immediately cries out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (v24). This prayer works. The boy's father is the first one to do what God the Father just commanded Peter, James and John to do (v7). Jesus answers it by commanding the spirit to come out and never enter again (v26). This is a death and resurrection scene. The boy is rigid, most people think he is dead, but Jesus takes his hand and he rises (vv26-27). How do we know? Jesus told them it comes out by prayer, implying that Jesus prayed. Who will be seized and thrown down, flogged and destroyed by the work of the Devil? Jesus who prayed "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (14:36-7). And "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Lk. 23:46). This is how we are to pray, knowing through him all things are possible.

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today's Passage: Mark 9:17-29 *17 And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. 18 And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able." 19 And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me." 20 And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. 21 And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. 22 And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." 23 And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" 25 And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." 26 And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. 28 And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" 29 And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."*

1. Jesus comes back from the mountain where he was transfigured to find the disciples arguing with the scribes. What could the disciples not do (verse 18)?
2. What did the unclean spirit do to the boy, and how do you think Jesus felt about it (verses 2-22)?
3. Sometimes we doubt what God can or will do. What should we believe according to Jesus (verse 23)? What do we do when we want God to do something (verse 29)?
4. Draw a picture of Jesus taking the boy by the hand and raising him up.

Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

29 And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."--Mark 9:29