

HELP, LORD, MY UNBELIEF

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Scripture: Mark 9:14-29

Our passage this morning is from Mark 9:14-29. I'm not going to read it but going to tell it to you and give you context. The previous passage shows that Jesus was up there – the transfiguration. Now He's come down, and when He comes down, He sees a big crowd. His disciples are there, the scribes; there seems to be some kind of discussion and argument going on. He walks into the midst of them and asks them, "What are you discussing among each other?" Then a man in the crowd says, "Teacher, I brought my boy to you because he is possessed with a spirit that makes him mute." And as Jesus wasn't there, they took him to the disciples but, he said, the disciples couldn't do anything to him. And Jesus says to him, "How long has he been like this?" and the man says, "From childhood." Jesus says, "Bring him to me." The man says that the spirit tries to destroy him. He has taken him to the fire and tried to burn him, or to the waters to try and drown him; and nobody has been able to help. Then he says to Jesus, "But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help me." And you can almost see Jesus recoiling at that "...if you can do anything". Jesus' words kind of capture that. He says, "If you can?" and then He adds, "All things are possible to him who believes." Then immediately, the boy's father cries out and says, "I do believe, help my unbelief." Then of course, Jesus commands the spirit to go and the spirit throws the boy to the ground convulsing, but the spirit is gone. A little later the disciples ask Jesus, "Why were we not able to get the spirit out." And Jesus answers, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer."

Shall we pray together?

Our heavenly Father, this is an account of Your Son had, and how He brought freedom for one who was captive to a spirit who had held him mute since childhood, and He touched him and freed him. Abba, now we ask that Your Holy Spirit would be with us; with me as I speak, and in every room where this message is being heard – that You would fill our hearts with a wonderful connection with You, that everything that You want to share with us, we would receive. Soften our hearts, make fertile our spirits. Lord, may our wills that can be sometimes so stubborn, become malleable as we submit to You. Teach us Father, through the work of Your Holy Spirit, on what we can glean from Your Son and the interaction with the father and his son. Help us Master, through this passage, to be able to look at our own lives differently, and through the grid of the principles that we can learn from this passage. We submit to You and we yield to You. Speak Master, for we are listening. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Let's look at this narrative and in a sense, move away from the mute boy, his father, the disciples, the demon that was there – and see what we can glean from it as principles that we can apply for each one of our lives. I'm not saying that the demons and spirits are not present with us. They are! Paul reminds us that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces in the heavenly realms. Sheila and I have had our fair share of confronting them in the power and the name of Jesus, and seeing them retreat and move. But I also want to add this as an aside, almost. Remember this about demons, about Satan:

- Satan and his followers, or demons, are limited. They can't procreate. So the original number that fell from heaven in that great cosmic rebellion with God remains that number.
- They can't be in two places at the same time; meaning that they are not omnipresent. If one of them is in Spain, he can't be in Mumbai. They are limited geographically. Only God is omnipresent.
- They are not all-powerful. They do have power, but only God is all-powerful, as Jesus showed us. "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world" is what scripture reminds us. Satan is powerful, but God is all-powerful, and we belong to Him.
- Satan is not omniscient. He doesn't know all things. Only God does. He's smart and can project a trajectory from the data that he has from history, but he doesn't know everything, although he will try and tell you that he does.

So just a few things as you think about some of the ways in which you get side-tracked and led astray.

But let's get back to the main story and the principles that we can glean from it.

1. There are some afflictions that have been with us for a long time that prevent us from living a normal life, but God is willing to deliver us from them.

These could be anything, beloved; it could be something physical like an ailment, headaches, stomach issues or whatever it is. It could be mental; it could have something to do with identity issues or an inferiority complex or depression. Or it could be social. Maybe you're shy, you can't mix, you have difficulty in social situations, you're socially awkward maybe. Or maybe in emotional areas – you're scarred by something in the past, or you've been abused. Or maybe intellectually you never see yourself as someone who can do well in academics. You see yourself as a failure in that area.

So in any of these areas, maybe is has prevented you from being who God wants you to be and fulfil the promises that God has for you. And as we look at this story, God is willing to help you in this particular area.

2. Our parents and friends care enough about us to want to help.

Sometimes we forget that we are indeed surrounded by ones who care and love us and want to help, as this father did. He knew about Jesus and he had heard about Jesus and he was bringing his son to Him. Just as the four friends brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus. We are indeed surrounded by people who care. But sometimes that fact escapes us.

Also, God cares as well. Isaiah 41:13 says, "*For I the Lord, Your God, will hold your right hand, it is I who says to you 'Fear not, I am the one who helps you.'*" Not only are you surrounded by friends and parents/relatives who care about your condition, but God cares for you as well.

3. Doubt is okay as long as faith trumps it.

I've often said that an integral part of faith is doubt because if it were not so, it would be fact. If we didn't have doubt, it would be a fact. But faith assumes the overcoming of doubt.

I love the way each of these versions put this particular line that this father says to Jesus.

- The NIV says, "I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief."
- The Passion Translation says, "I do believe Lord, help my little faith."
- The Message says, "Then I believe, help me with my doubts."
- The Living Bible says, "I do have faith, oh help me to have more."
- The Contemporary English Version says, "I do have faith; please help me to have even more."

And maybe till now, the doubt has taken center stage, but faith has taken a backseat. And maybe the principle for you today is that it's okay to have that doubt, but to let faith in God overcome that doubt. Lord help my unbelief.

4. You believe in God's omnipotence but never applied it.

You've never applied God's omnipotence to your situation even though you believe in it. It's possible to say: Of course, I believe God can do anything but I really don't know whether He will do something in this area of my life. This is just something that I need to have to take along with me. This is my lot; this is my cross. And maybe it's not. Maybe God is saying, "I am interested in doing something about it. I can do something about it." Maybe you've never taken it to Him thinking that though God can do anything, I don't think He can do something in this particular area of my life.

Or maybe you've had faith for others but never for yourself – that you are able to pray for other people, for all kinds of ailments and illnesses and difficulties, but never really been able to bring that kind of faith to bear on your own situation or circumstance or illness. Maybe today it's time to bring that issue before the Lord and say, "If you are my God, You can make me whole. Lord this is my need and I bring it to You. Lord I know that You are able."

I wonder, as we've gone through that scripture and the principles that we've been able to mine from it, whether God is ruffling the waters of your life and saying, "There are things in your life that you've just assumed that I'm not willing or interested in touching or healing or bringing My power to bear on them. You've just assumed that, but that's not My will for you." Is that happening right now as we speak, that there are things that are surfacing that you're saying "Wow! That's true. I have prayed for others but never for myself. I know God can do all things but I don't bring it down to that thing that I need." And God can reply or do things in varying ways.

- When we take things to God, He can heal that affliction or that illness, or that situation or circumstance can be resolved. He can do it. I know. Most of you heard how God healed my back. I had four herniated discs in my back and they told me that I would never be able to carry a briefcase in my hand. And God touched me overnight and healed me. So God can, just in the twinkling of an eye, bring healing to you.
- He can leave that affliction but heal you of the associated baggage that prevents you from fulfilling your ministry. Did you get that? He can leave that affliction, but all the

baggage that you have accumulated about that affliction, that prevents you from doing what God has called you to do, God can heal those things.

Take the example of Joni Erickson Tada. God didn't heal her when she became a quadriplegic, but God did heal after a couple of months of searching and asking for healing, going to various meetings, contacting different pastors to pray for her. She finally realized that it was not His will to heal her. But it was His will to heal her of all the mental baggage that prevented her from seeing what an outspoken person she has become for disabled people – those who are differentially abled – a spokesman who has travelled all around the world with that particular affliction, but cleared to be able to be all that God has wanted her to be. I wonder whether that part of you is hidden, is not seeing the light of day.

- He can ask you to de-focus from that affliction and experience His grace. Take your eyes off of that limiting circumstance and understand that God allows His grace to flow into it so that that area never remains a weakness but an area of strength. Are you with me, beloved? Is faith arising within you? And hope? I want you to remember this: God will not allow anything to exist, to come upon you that you cannot deal with, especially when it has to do with fulfilling the reason that God placed you here on earth. Nothing can stand in the way of that specific purpose of God's will in placing you on the earth – not a mental issue, not a physical issue, not a social issue, not an intellectual one. If it's standing in the way of God's will and purpose for life, God is interested in helping you overcome it, remove it or giving you grace to move it to one side and still follow through. I think the question for you and me today is: if that is indeed God's will, then am I going to be bold enough today to have enough faith to say – Lord, here's the one thing that holds me back, will You deal with it? And will You show me what I need to do to allow You to deal with it.

5. The need to pray.

The final principle from the passage is the last line. When the disciples ask, "Why could we not cast out the spirit?" And Jesus says, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer." And we need to pray.

So we're going to end this service with prayer. We are going to pray for that one thing that has been holding you back. Whatever it is, I'm going to invite you to just let faith arise and to turn to the Lord and say, Lord, here it is. This is the one thing and I bring it before you. We're able to pray and say, Lord, would You come alongside and would You do what needs to be done to once again allow us to fulfil our purpose in life and the reason You placed us here.

Would you do that, beloved? Do assume whatever posture you are comfortable with. Maybe you want to stand, hold out your hand to the Lord. maybe you want to slip out of your chair and kneel on the floor and say to Him: This is it, Lord. Whatever posture you want to assume, but would you bring that one thing and make it front and center at this moment? Let's go to the Lord in prayer and say: Lord, if You are willing, would You make me whole? Would You take this thing? Would You help me through this difficult time? Or whatever it is, beloved, would you bring it to Him right now? Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we bring before You those things that we have assumed are part of our lives; things that we have not brought to You thinking that You're not interested or believing that You can do all things, but not really bringing this particular issue to You. Lord, in every place, every room, every home, we ask that Your Spirit would move and that You would do what only You can do. You can do all things. Do what needs to be done as faith in each person allows them to lift their hands to You and say: This is it, Lord, this is it. Show me how this area cannot be a stumbling block in fulfilling the purposes that You have for me. Show me now, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Psalm 115:1 says this: Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name goes all the glory for Your unfailing love and faithfulness.

Beloved, let's sing this song in closing and give Him the glory for what He has done right now in our lives.

Not to us, but to Your name alone
Be all the glory, the glory, forever.
For Your faithfulness and steadfast love,
Receive the glory, the glory belongs to You.

All that we've accomplished You have done for us,
And any fruit we harvest is a gift from Your hand.
We are only jars of clay that hold a priceless treasure,
And we exist to bring You pleasure, O God.

Not to us, but to Your name alone
Be all the glory, the glory, forever.
For Your faithfulness and steadfast love,
Receive the glory, the glory belongs to You.

Only by Your mercy can we come to You
Though we deserved Your judgment, You have called us by name
So we glory in the Cross of Christ that made us Yours forever,
That joined our lives together to sing.

Not to us, but to Your name alone
Be all the glory, the glory, forever.
For Your faithfulness and steadfast love,
Receive the glory, the glory belongs to You.
