

A Father and a Son

Mark 6:4-6 (NLT)

⁴ Then Jesus told them, "A prophet is honored everywhere except in his own hometown and among his relatives and his own family." ⁵ And because of their unbelief, he couldn't do any miracles among them except to place His hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶ And He was amazed at their unbelief.

Mark 9:14-29 (NLT)

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 [weak]. So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn't do it."

¹⁹ Jesus said to His disciples, "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 and fasting."

Proverbs 3:7-8 (NLT)

⁷ Don't be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the Lord and turn away from evil.

⁸ Then you will have healing for your body and strength for your bones.

Proverbs 4:20-23 (NLT)

²⁰ My child, pay attention to what I say. Listen carefully to my words.

²¹ Don't lose sight of them. Let them penetrate deep into your heart, ²² for they bring life to those who find them, and healing to their whole body.

²³ Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.

I. The Setting

- Beautiful scenery to set the stage for our story.
 - In the background is the majestic and towering Mt. Heron, silent, snowcapped and regal. A testimony to the greatness of God.
- Jesus has just been transfigured on that mountain.
 - He appeared, along with Elijah and Moses, to three of His disciples.
 - Our story begins with Jesus' return from that mountain-top experience.

II. A Scene of Extremes (vv.14-19)

- Imagine:
 - The other nine disciples waiting at the foot of Mt. Heron for Jesus and the last three disciples to come down from the mountain.
 - The nine are anxious. A problem has occurred while they were away.
 - A man, having heard that Jesus casts out demons, brought his demon-possessed son to see Him.
- It is ironic that the father brought his son first to the nine disciples (upon hearing Jesus was away, begged the disciples for a miracle).
 - Jesus will assume a measure of responsibility in the sense that if someone has reached out to His disciples, it is as though they have reached out to Him (remember Mark 6:7–13, where the disciples are commissioned and granted authority over unclean spirits). This may explain part of Jesus' annoyance with His disciples.
- When Jesus arrived, the boy's father explained what had happened.
 - Jesus' response was not expected.
 - He chastises the disciples, the father, and the scribes who were also present.
 - You faithless people. How long must I put up with you?
 - He knew His time was limited, and
 - He lived among faithless people.
- Modern scholarship argues that the boy had epilepsy, based on the biblical symptoms. (It is believed Julius Caesar also suffered from the affliction.) The condition was sometimes thought to be the result of contact with evil spirits or demons.
- Perhaps Jesus' rebuke about unfaithfulness includes His knowledge that the present generation has failed to respond to the good news of the presence of the Kingdom. The same will be true of every generation that follows.

III. The Situation Worsens (vv. 20-23).

- Demons know who Jesus is. Several biblical stories prove this. This story gives us this truth as well.
- The son immediately had convulsions, writhing and foaming at the mouth, to prove its dominion over the boy.
- Jesus learns the boy has been affected this way since he was small.
- The boy's condition is no passing condition but one that has plagued the man's son from early childhood, making it possibly harder to cure.
- The father begs Jesus to cure the boy, "if He can."
- The problem is so severe that the father is not really confident that Jesus, despite His remarkable reputation, can do anything to help.
 - In all probability other exorcists besides Jesus' disciples had failed to rid the boy of the spirit. Jesus' ability to cast it out is therefore all the more impressive.
- Of course, Jesus picks up on the if-you-can-part immediately. (Can we see why Jesus calls these people faithless?)
- "Anything is possible if a person believes."

IV. The Main Point for Today (v 24).

- The father's response is very significant: "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!"

V. Conclusion to the Story and Jesus' Word of Advice (vv 25-29).

- Why is the father's confession of weak faith so significant?
 - First, the father confesses to having faith. Just not enough, evidently.
 - Second, he wants to believe more fully: "Help me with my unbelief!"
 - The lesson here is that humility comes along side our faith. It is not enough for us to say we believe; it is quite another thing to know .
- We are human and flawed. Our faith will always need to be strengthened by God. This instills humility in our own abilities.
- "I command you to come out of this child and never enter him again!" Jesus' power is made clear to everyone, including the evil spirit who then screamed, convulsed again, and left the boy.
- While everyone thought the boy was dead (he appeared so), Jesus just reached down and helped the boy to stand up. He walked away cured — and happy.
- The nine disciples wondered why they failed to heal with the boy.
- Jesus tells them they had forgotten to pray.
 - We will always and ultimately fail when we forget to pray for the Lord's guidance.

VI. Now a Word From Pastor Elizabeth on the Matter.

- The text today illustrates a fairly common occurrence in Scripture: the interplay between the journey inward to God and the journey outward to the world. Other examples:
 - Moses descends from his hallowed sojourn on Mt. Sinai to confront rebellion and idolatry (Exodus 32);
 - Elijah leaves the quiet strength of Horeb to face the paganism of Jezebel and Ahab (1 Kings 19); and
 - Jesus Himself is driven from His baptism to temptation in the wilderness (1:9–13).
- Whenever the disciples are separated from Jesus they fall into crises.
- The nine disciples did not suggest to the boy's father that they wait for Jesus' return.
 - Instead, they tried to heal the son.
 - They had seen Jesus perform miraculous healings, including casting out demons.
 - They had heard (and remembered) the words Jesus used.
 - They thought they had Jesus' "formula."
 - In essence, they thought they could heal the son themselves.
 - After all, Jesus had previously sent them out to do this work.
 - It's possible the nine disciples thought
 - Perhaps: Here's our chance to come out from behind Jesus and show how significant we are!
 - Perhaps: Why don't we take advantage of this situation and grab some of the attention Jesus always gets?
- How many times have we thought this way? Think of the times you (and I) have;
 - believed we could handle the situation on our own, with our own strength;
 - thought, foolishly, that we knew "the magic formula;"
 - could say all the right things to make it "work;" and then
 - fallen "on our faces" in failure.
- Why do we fail like this?
 - We forget to pray first and always.
 - We forget we can do nothing effectively for God without the power of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in us, guiding us.
- The nine disciples failed for the same reason.
 - They thought they could heal the damaged boy with their own power and for they own glory.
 - They had been given authority from Jesus to heal people in His name. So they were confused.
 - But if they had thought it through, they would have realized they did not act in Jesus' name.
 - Like the father, their faith was weak. Unlike the father, they don't see it until the end of the story.
- The crowd's dissatisfaction with the disciples is offset by its hopes and satisfaction at seeing Jesus.
- It is possible the scribes, through their debates with the nine disciples, have caused resentment from the

- crowd over the inability of the disciples to heal the boy.
- However, the doubts and disbelief of the crowd do not determine Jesus' willingness or ability to act.
 - On the contrary, the authority of Jesus' mission and person exerts sovereign influence in human affairs.
- When Jesus first appeared after coming down from Mt. Heron, the people were amazed, overwhelmed with awe.
 - Jesus may have still been radiant from being in God's presence. That would have made for a stunning picture. (We are not told that Jesus returned to "normal," a pre-transfiguration" appearance, or if He "glowed" at all.)
- In Matthew's account of this story, (1) Matthew increases the respect shown for Jesus, (2) we see the boy's father kneeling before Jesus and addressing Him as "lord" (Matt 17:15) in place of Mark's "teacher"
- In Luke's version, he (1) enhances more sympathy by describing the boy as the man's "only child" (9:38), who is possessed by an evil spirit that "will hardly leave him" (9:39), (2) describes how the man has not merely "asked" the disciples to heal his son but has "begged" them (9:40), and (3) ends on a note of praise (9:43).
- All three versions highlight faith. Jesus speaks directly to the matter of faith — rather, the lack of faith — in His own disciples, in the boy's father, and in the crowd.
 - We see that when Jesus rebukes everyone because of their insufficient faith, it brings today's main point to light.
 - We all need more faith. It is something that we can develop every day.
 - The key to this begins with humility and then the realization of our faith is insufficient. Daily prayer will increase it!
 - The passage today from Mark 6:4-6 provides more context to Jesus' frustration over the faithlessness of the people.
- All things are possible for the one who has faith, Jesus reminds everyone.
 - The opposite is also true: little is possible for someone who has no faith.
- It is interesting that the important conversation between Jesus and the father in 9:21–24 is omitted by Matthew's and Luke's versions of the story.
 - For the other two Gospels the significance of the story is in the miraculous, whereas for Mark the miraculous is second to faith, and faith to discipleship.
- For Mark the significance of Jesus cannot be fully conveyed by what He does, but only by who He is.
- Jesus can expel demonic forces with a word, but the instilling of faith is a much harder matter.
 - Disbelief, whether from scribes, crowds, disciples, or desperate fathers, is both a greater opposition and more serious obstacle than all the hosts of pandemonium.
 - The father has only the mustard-seed beginnings of faith.
 - The problem is not divine unwillingness or divine inability, but human unbelief. What is impossible to humans is possible to God. Everything is possible to him who believes.
- What Jesus commands of the father is what He earlier commanded of the hemorrhaging woman (Mark 5:34) and the synagogue ruler (5:36).
- The sole bridge between frail humanity and the all-sufficiency of God is faith.
- True faith is always aware how small and inadequate it is.
- The father becomes a believer not when he amasses a sufficient amount of faith but when he risks everything on what little faith he has, when he yields his insufficiency to the true sufficiency of Jesus,
 - The risk of faith is more costly to the father than bringing his son to Jesus, for he can talk about his son but he must "cry out" for faith.
- True faith takes no confidence in itself, nor does it judge Jesus by the weakness of His followers.
 - It looks to Jesus who stands in the place of God, whose authoritative word restores life from chaos.
 - True faith is unconditional openness to God, a decision to trust, against all odds, that Jesus is able.
- In a certain sense, Jesus enables both the father and his son:
 - for the father, the needed faith,

- for the son, the needed deliverance from an evil spirit.
- The plea for faith, even if admittedly weak, was all that was necessary.
 - The waning faith of the father is easily explained as the result of the disciples' failure (and others before them) to exorcise the demon in the first place.
 - The father may have reasoned that if Jesus' disciples could not overpower the spirit, then perhaps Jesus Himself would not be able to either.
- When Jesus sees the crowd gathering and converging there, He brings the exorcism to a speedy conclusion.
- "I command you."
 - This contrasts with the disciples' earlier unsuccessful attempt as they had given commands, which the demon had ignored.
 - This time it is Jesus himself who is giving the commands, which the demon cannot ignore.
 - Jesus' command did not go unheeded but caused an upheaval. Even today the same result would be seen. Jesus leaves upheaval in His wake. We are changed and many times we are resistant at first, just like the demon.
- In sharp contrast to that violent reaction, the boy now suddenly stops moving and lies so still that many thought he had died.
 - The unusual stillness of the boy offered additional proof of the eviction of the demon. Remember the demon had consistently manifested itself by throwing the boy in water and fire and, when confronted by Jesus, by violent convulsions.
 - Mark does not contradict the opinion of those who thought that the boy had died; perhaps he had. If so, Jesus' taking him by the hand, and raising him up, only compounds the already astounding deed. The boy is able to stand on his own, thus demonstrating his restoration to health.
- Like those disciples, their inadequacy and failure now drive them to prayer, which is God's gift to them and another form of fellowship with Jesus as their Lord.
- The story underscores the importance of faith, for along with repentance it is the prerequisite for unleashing the power of God. When faith is present, God works.
- The last verse pulls it all together: we need
 - stronger faith to deal with the issues we will face in life, and
 - prayer has to undergird every thing we do, everything we need, everything!
- Like the nine disciples, we get overconfident in ourselves, but ultimately find out that our confidence comes from a strong personal relationship with Jesus and not in what we can do.
 - Philippians 4:13 reminds us of this. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.