

Theme: Through their failure to cast out a demon, the disciples learn that ministry and spiritual warfare are not based on technique or their own abilities, but rather by consistently walking close to God through faith and prayer.

I. Intro - The Importance of Differences

- A. We often learn by comparing Gospel accounts to see different emphases.
- B. We also learn by comparing similar stories within a Gospel to see different emphases in those reports. For example, the two feedings of the multitude are teaching different things.
- C. Mark gives far more detail of this story than Matthew or Luke - the conversation with the father of the boy!
- D. Mark also reports this deliverance differently than others - no crowd reaction, worship of God, etc.
- E. Key point: training the disciples through their failure
- F. What does Mark expect disciples/apprentices of Jesus to learn from this incident?

II. Another Spiritual Battle

- A. Jesus returns to an argument
When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵ As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. ¹⁶ “What are you arguing with them about?” he asked. Mark 9:14-16
 1. The disciples and the scribes are arguing again
 2. These scribes are against Jesus and his disciples, and they probably think the disciples should not be trying to cast out demons since they are not “approved” and “trained” by the teachers of the law.

3. Jesus asks (the scribes) why they are arguing

B. The disciples' failure in a spiritual battle

A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.” Mark 9:17-18

1. A pitiful description of a tormented boy

- a. v18 describes epileptic seizures (Matthew 17:15)
- b. But there is more than physical epilepsy - demonic activity that makes the boy mute
- c. We will see that Jesus treats this as demonization, not a physical illness.

2. Your disciples tried to expel it and failed!

- a. This is the source of the conflict with the scribes
- b. It also drives the narrative as a whole.

C. Jesus expels the demon

When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” ²⁶ The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.” ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. Mark 9:25-27

1. The demon displays magic toward the boy and tries to resist Jesus.
2. Jesus commands the demon and it obeys - but the boy looks like he dies in the process!

3. But Jesus “raises” the boy from this death just as He delivers him from the demonic spirit.
 - a. He looked like a corpse & people said he was dead
 - b. Jesus takes him by the hand - just like the little girl in Mark 5:41
 - c. The verbs “lifted” and “stood” are words used for resurrection.
4. Once again Jesus has healed, delivered, and given new life!
5. Interestingly, this time Mark does not record the reaction of the crowd or describe how others turned to Jesus - very unusual for these accounts in Mark.

III. Apprenticeship Through Failure

A. The key question: why did the disciples fail?

After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “**Why couldn’t we drive it out?**” Mark 9:28

1. This is the lesson they and we are meant to learn
2. Jesus gave them authority to drive out demons!
He appointed twelve — designating them apostles — that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and to have authority to drive out demons. Mark 3:14-15
3. They had driven out many demons before!
Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits...
¹³They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them. Mark 6:7, 13
 - a. Jesus again gave them authority over demons
 - b. They drove out many demons & healed the sick
4. Why did they fail this time?

B. A failure from a lack of faith

1. Jesus speaks of the unbelieving generation
“**O unbelieving generation,**” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.” Mark 9:19
 - a. This statement is in all 3 synoptic Gospels
 - b. Jesus immediately identifies faith as a key issue
2. The conversation with the father centers on faith
Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?” “From childhood,” he answered. ²² “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” ²³ “If you can’?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.” ²⁴ Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” Mark 9:21-24
 - a. If you can do anything - an expression of doubt in Jesus’ ability (after the disciples’ failure)
 - b. IF you can?? - Jesus rebukes this lack of faith
 - c. I believe - help my unbelief! An honest cry for help!
 - d. This honest cry for Jesus to sustain and grow faith has resonated with believers down through the ages, and it was recognized by Jesus not as a spirit of doubt but as a spirit of faith.
3. In Matthew, the answer to the disciples is about faith
Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” ²⁰ He replied, “Because you have so little faith...” Matt. 17:19-20
 - a. Matthew collapses the conversation with the father and the disciples into one about faith. Mark, keeps the full detail to show the same problem: a lack of faith.

- b. This shows that the essence of the conversation is about the need for faith, not just on the part of the father, but also on the part of the disciples as they minister to others.

- 4. The disciples' failure to cast out this strong demon showed that they were not operating out of faith but rather in their own knowledge and abilities.

C. A failure from a lack of prayer

After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"²⁹ He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer." Mark 9:28-29

1. Jesus directly relates their failure in spiritual battle to their failure in prayer.
2. Jesus is not speaking about prayer in the moment of spiritual battle - He did not even pray during the battle!
3. He is speaking about a failure to build a life of prayer, drawing near to God in regular prayer each day.
4. Jesus engaged in prayer & the disciples interrupted!
Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him,³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" Mark 1:35-37
 - a. We see Jesus regularly withdrawing for prayer - but the disciples are not learning from this, for we are never told they follow this practice.
 - b. In fact, they are seen to interrupt Him, preferring the action of the crowd and ministry to the quiet of personal communion with the Father in prayer.

- 5. It is no surprise then to find that when Jesus commands them to pray in the Garden as the ultimate spiritual battle approaches they fall asleep! (Mark 14:34-42)

IV. Applying the Word

A. Growing in faith through a life of prayer

1. The two key problems leading to failure in this passage were a lack of faith and prayer.
2. These two aspects are intimately untied - faith is only sustained and grows in close communion with God.
3. Obviously, faith grows as we hear and study God's Word, as we worship, fellowship with others, etc.
4. But one key way of communion with God is prayer - and this is especially important as we consider spiritual warfare.
5. Each of us can think of situations where we know Satan is at work in our life or the life of someone we love - and like the disciples, we often find ourselves powerless in the face of these situations!
 - a. Personal spiritual attack in my life
 - b. Struggling marriage
 - c. Troubles with my children or grandchildren
 - d. Friends with major life struggles and doubt
6. In these situations we are tempted to trust in our abilities to "fix" the situation - but this is a fatal mistake!
 - a. You can not fight a spiritual battle with physical weapons!

- b. For example, even with modern medicine to control the boy's epileptic seizures, he was still being attacked by a demon - and there is no pill for that!
 - c. Furthermore, faith is reliance on God, and it dies in the air of self-sufficiency!
 - d. The way forward is to trust in God, not my own abilities, and this will be cultivated in prayer.
7. What is needed is close communion with God, but we live in an age that looks for quick techniques - and this is fatal in the life of an apprentice of Jesus!
- a. There are no "techniques" to grow in faith or defeat Satan's strongholds!
 - b. The core of discipleship/apprenticeship is being with Jesus - communing with Him.
 - c. Furthermore, faith thrives in the atmosphere of prayer as we humbly admit our own lack and cry out to God - "I believe - help my unbelief!"
 - d. Nor is this about getting the right technique or formula in prayer - there is no such thing!
 - e. Example: our prayers for Linda in Okinawa
 - f. Our ultimate need is developing a life of communion with God, hearing from His Word and laying our hearts before Him in prayer.
8. I will give some tips in After Hours for growing in a life of prayer - not from an expert but one who has spent a life trying to grow in this area
9. But the key thing is regularly spending some time in prayer - this is about time with God, not technique!
10. I mentioned two great opportunities already today - the prayer platoon and Maryland Prays.
11. Just take some time regularly (daily!) to pray for yourself to draw close to God, and to pray for areas where you want to see God work.

12. We will also be having some prayer opportunities for the church as the year moves along - join in!

B. Our Communion Table

1. This Table is a weekly chance to commune with God!
2. Thank God our access is not based on how well we have performed this week! Jesus did not send the disciples away because of their failure - but spent time alone with them to speak to them!
3. As we come, let's confess our sin and failures - He is gracious!
4. As we come, let's ask the Spirit to work in us to stir up a deeper desire to spend time with God.

Apprenticeship Through Failure

Mark 9:14-29

January 28, 2024

Communion

Psalm 34:17-19 Philippians 4:6-7

Teaching keywords: Christology; God's glory; Kingdom of God; Law and Gospel; prophets; second coming

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.
 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
 Philippians 4:6-7

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¹⁹ “O unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.” ²⁰ So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. ²¹ Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?” “From childhood,” he answered. ²² “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

²³ “If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.” ²⁴ Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” ²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” ²⁶ The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said,

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