

Faith and the Power of God

by Jerry Hopkins

Mark 9:14-29

Most of us want to live on the excitement of the highs in our lives. We don't want to come back down to the valley and walk amidst the unbelief and ridicule. Our faith is not the kind that thrives on the assaults of unbelieving and unkind people. It is not the kind that confronts boldly and courageously the demonic and satanic. It is not even the kind that stands against simple human wickedness.

The religious leaders, the Scribes and Pharisees, harassed Jesus and His disciples. They were a determined, embittered and hateful group of people. Here in verse 14 it says that these Scribes were "disputing with them." They were trying to "set them straight" about things in relationship to Jesus. Their "disputing" was not according to faith or the power of God. Jesus confronted them. Verse 16 says that Jesus asked them, "What are you discussing with them?" But before they can answer, a man from the multitude answers, saying, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever he seizes him, he throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast him out, but they could not" (Mk. 9:17-18).

I think it is important that we recognize once again this fact. *Demons are real. Satan is real.* There is a vast multitude of demons who serve in his kingdom. Their aim is to mislead, defeat, discourage, enslave and destroy us. One of the deceptive things is to think that after we become Christians we are free from the influence and deception of Satan and his servants. Here the disciples who walked with Jesus could not free this young man from the grip of demonic powers.

Jesus' response is important. He said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me" (Mk. 9:19). Here is the voice of holy despair, godly sorrow over the state of unbelief, the faithless people. Even Jesus' disciples failed in this situation.

First, there is the powerlessness of unbelief in this story. Unbelief has no power. Jesus' disciples had failed. He had called them and trained them and here they cannot exercise their authority over the evil spiritual powers of the demonic (3:14, 15). Jesus' words are fitting words for us today. Many people are comfortable in their unbelief. They are even bold in their denial of obvious spiritual truths. Jesus comes to confront us in unbelief. He comes grieving that we have no spiritual power or victory. Unbelief cannot please God. Neither can it succeed against Satan. Satan is pleased when we do not believe God and cannot exercise authority in the spiritual realm.

Second, here is the clear statement of the power of faith. The father said to Jesus, "If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us" (Mk. 9:22b). Can you imagine a person saying to God, "If you can"? Surely God can do anything He wants to do. God is not bound by the finite or by any power. He can do anything. He made everything that is out of nothing. It's not a question of whether God can do this. Jesus clearly states this back to the man. He says, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes" (Mk. 9:23).

The man said, "If you can do anything," Jesus says, "The issue is not whether I can do anything or not, but the real issue is in you—will you believe?" Do you believe? Do you believe in God? Do you believe in Jesus?

If we truly believe in God and in Jesus, we will believe in this book—the Bible. We will commit ourselves to living for the Lord Jesus Christ and living in the power of His Spirit.

The immediate response of this man to Jesus' statement is given in verse 24—"Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!'" This father is an honest man. He is one of the most transparent people in God's Word. He recognizes his faith and yet also his weakness and pleads for help, for real faith.

This is an encouragement to all of us. We do not need to think that we are hypocrites because our faith is not perfect. The Devil can work in us on this count. He will keep us in discouragement and defeat, beating ourselves and accusing one another. There are two questions that all of us must face—

- Do I believe God can do anything? We can ask this question another way—Do I believe in the God described in this book, the Bible?
- Do I believe that God will do what He has promised that He will do? This father believed in Jesus and His power. Jesus responded to this faith and He dealt with this situation.

Power comes to the people of God when there is faith. This is exactly what we need. The writer of Hebrews summed this up when he said, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6).

Third, there is a relationship between this kind of faith and what we do in our Christian lives. Jesus, Peter, James and John have been on the Mount of Transfiguration. They have been in the presence of God. Now they have come back down into the valley. Here are the attacks of Satan, the oppression of the demonic and the embittered challenges and hostilities of religious enemies. Jesus' disciples had failed to deal with this particularly stubborn demon. They asked Jesus, "Why could we not cast him out?" Jesus was able to do what they could not, but what they should have been to do after walking with Jesus and receiving His instruction.

Jesus replied to their question, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting" (Mk. 9:29). Faith must express itself in communication with God and in personal sacrifice. Prayer is linking one's life up with the Eternal God and listening to Him, obeying Him. Fasting is a matter of self-denial and surrender to the work of God in our lives. If we want to do anything significant for God we are going to have to be willing to spend time with Him and sacrifice some things for Him.

The disciples had not done this. They had not taken time to seek God about this situation, nor had they taken time to sacrifice for this situation in fasting and self-denial.

Those who do not believe will not pray. They will think it is foolish to spend time talking with God. In fact, they will think it is talking with one's self. Rabid unbelief is exposed in this area. The person who does not believe will not pray. The person who does not pray is living in unbelief. Those who do not believe and do not pray certainly will not fast or deny themselves. They will not have the discipline to deny themselves.

CONCLUSION

A test of any person's faith is his prayer life and personal discipline of self-denial and fasting. We must be a people of prayer. The result will be great power in our lives, in our families, in our church and in our community. God will show Himself mighty on our behalf. He will empower us.