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Celebrating our Freedom in Christ!

Mark 9:11-29
July 4th 2010
Lazy Mountain Bible Church
Pastor David Dahms

Prayer for Our Country

Introduction

Phil Callaway didn't know what to say when his young children asked if Mommy was going to die. His wife, Ramona, suffered horrible seizures.

Hundreds of friends and relatives prayed, but Ramona's weight eventually slipped to 90 pounds. Medical specialists tried everything, but by the fall of 1996, the seizures were occurring daily, sometimes hourly.

Phil rarely left Ramona's side. He wondered if she would even make it to her 30th birthday. One evening, when things looked utterly hopeless, Phil paced their dark back yard, then fell to his knees. "God!" he cried out. "I can't take it anymore. Please do something!"

Suddenly a doctor's name came to mind. Phil called the doctor, who saw Ramona the next morning and diagnosed a rare chemical deficiency.

Within a week, Ramona's seizures ended. Her eyes sparkled again. The miracle was so incredible, Phil says, "God gave me back my wife."

Christian Reader (Jan/Feb 2002), pp.12-13; source: Luis Palau, It's a God Thing, www.palau.org/godthing

In today's world every one of us encounters a season in life where we sit with a loved one who is being taken by a debilitating disease. We feel helpless. We pray, but we don't get answers like Phil did. A doctor's name doesn't come to mind. In fact nothing or little does.

We take our loved ones to physicians. We put them on the prayer chain. We pray. We beg. We cry out, we sometimes cry.

During these times we concur with the writer who said, 'These are the days that try men's souls'

If we could have a face to face, a one on one meeting with God, during times like this, what would He say to us?

Today we get to find out, as we see a man faced with the same desperation we have felt or one day will experience.

Let's read the account in Mark 9:14-29

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Scripture

Mark 9:14–29 (ESV)

Jesus Heals a Boy with an Unclean Spirit

¹⁴ And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. ¹⁵ And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. ¹⁶ And he asked them, “**What are you arguing about with them?**” ¹⁷ And someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute.

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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.

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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.**”

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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.**”

Explanation

So let's put ourselves with our situation in the story.

SLIDE 6 What is your impossible situation?

A situation far beyond your ability to control, or fix?

We all have them. There is not one of us immune from impossible situations—it is the way of life. Yep, that neatly dressed person in front of you, or behind you, or next to you. They probably won't feel comfortable telling you. But everyone of us face an impossible situation. It is the way of life.

- A habit or addiction you can't break.
- A job you can't quite, though it would be much healthier if you did or could?
- Aging parents who are far away, or maybe near, who need care but refuse it, or demand it.
- A marriage that just can't get on stride with one another.
- A spouse, or boyfriend or girlfriend, or best friend, who is antagonistic to your faith—and who doesn't want you here. Not only do they tightly grasp onto their atheism, they demand that you adopt their atheism.
- Debt that has built up to an impossible height with no end in sight.
- Divorce, abandonment, depression, adultery?
- A friend, a child, or a loved one with an impossible medical condition? Or perhaps yourself?

One truth to embrace in this story is this: You are not alone. That is our situation in this story. A man's son is demon possessed. The demon causes symptoms we would assign to epilepsy today. But the cause is this spirit, a demon, that dwells within him.

What does that mean?

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What is demon possession? It means that the foot soldiers of the enemy of Christ, Satan, have taken up residence in this boy's body. And it robs this boy and his family's freedom.

Now really, some reading this might say, "This is a backwards time. They simply didn't understand medical conditions as we do today. This boy has classic epilepsy. In today's modern world we would accomplish nothing we credited demons as the cause of medical conditions. If the father could have, he simply could have taken the boy to a hospital and had him treated. There just aren't demons in action today? We have progressed beyond that in the 21st Century."

But Jesus doesn't give us that option. This isn't a situation like we previously read about with the woman with an issue of blood, or the young girl who died. Jesus doesn't doubt this father's account at all. This would have been the perfect time for Jesus to "correct" this father's wrong thinking and said, "Sir, you needn't worry about demons or spirits. They just don't exist. This is a medical condition, and if you had more faith in medical science, you would see that and get this boy the proper care."

Simply "refusing to believe" a threat exists, does not make that threat cease to exist.

We could very well say, "We are tired of these wars. Let's just give peace a chance. Let's bring our boys home. We can't be the peacekeepers of the world."

There is great attraction to that view. But just having that view does not make the threat disappear. We may disagree on how to deal with the threat, but to deny the threat is to leave yourself very vulnerable. As we have seen just this week, as it was revealed that 9 deep cover agents of Russia were found and arrested in this country.

You can choose to deny demonism exists, and leave yourself vulnerable, or you can choose to accept spiritual realities, and choose to respond accordingly. Because at the end of this text, Jesus gives us a very important, indeed essential tool for addressing the reality of demons and their activity in our world today.

Indeed it is one of the reasons God preserved this text for us so that we might learn from it today.

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Let's take a brief pause here to review what demons and demonism are :

Demon, Demon Possession.

Demons are fallen angels, divinely created supernatural beings who, under the leadership of Lucifer (Satan), rebelled against God. Demonism is the activity of demons, while demonology is the study of demons and their activity, for the purpose of knowing the tactics of the enemy (2 Cor 2:11) in order to properly exercise authority over them (Lk 10:19).¹

Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (610). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House.

Demons are created beings, personal, immortal, and incapable of reconciliation with God. They have great power as compared with humans, but little power as compared with God. God has given us authority over them, so that in the name of Jesus they must obey God's people, even as they must obey the Lord himself.²

Manifestation.

Often demons prefer to hide rather than to make their presence known, for then they can exercise control without hindrance. When they do manifest, often when challenged, all sorts of strange and frightening things may occur. They possess supernatural powers (cf. Rv 16:14) which they exhibit outright or through their victims. The Gerasene demoniac had superhuman physical strength, so that he could not be bound with fetters or chains (Mk 5:4, 5); he lived in tombs and went about night and day screaming and injuring himself with stones.

The spirit in the demonized boy in Mark 9 rendered him dumb and deaf, threw him on the ground, and caused him to roll about and to foam at the mouth (vv 18, 20). The demon caused him to grind his teeth and become rigid; he had tried to kill the boy by throwing him into the fire and into the water on various occasions (vv 18, 22). Before leaving at the command of Jesus, the demon cried out (cf. Mk 1:26), convulsed the boy terribly, and left him lying like a corpse. Jesus took him by the hand and raised him up (v 27). Similar manifestations take place today.³

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Why did God include this account in Scripture?

To show us that demon possession is not mere sickness or insanity but a desperate satanic attempt to distort and destroy God's image in man (cf. TDNT, s.v. "*daimōn*," 2:18-19).⁴

So let us look at what Jesus wants to teach us—just as it has been for the past three weeks, Christ's emphasis is on raising faith in his followers.

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Mark 9:14–29 (ESV)

Jesus Heals a Boy with an Unclean Spirit

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Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Mk 5:2–5). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

them?”¹⁷ And someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute.

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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.

O unbelieving generation emphasizes the characteristic cause of all spiritual failure—lack of faith in God (cf. 9:23; 10:27).⁵

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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.**”

Explanation

The words, **If You can do anything**, indicate that the disciples’ inability to expel the demon (v. 18) had shaken the father’s faith in Jesus’ ability.

Jesus took up the father’s words of doubt, **If You can**, to show that the point was not His ability to heal the boy but the father’s ability to trust in God who can do what is humanly impossible (cf. 10:27)⁶

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Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Mk 9:20–24). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

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Everything is possible for him who believes (cf. 9:29). Faith sets no limits on God's power and submits itself to His will (cf. 14:35-36; 1 John 5:14-15).⁷

John remember this and summarized what he learned in 1 John 5.

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1 John 5:14–15 (ESV)

¹⁴ And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

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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."**

With a final burst of violence on his victim and a scream of rage (cf. 1:26), the demon fled. **The boy** lay limp in utter exhaustion looking **like a corpse** so **that many** concluded, **He's dead. But Jesus ... lifted him ... up.**

Jesus explained, **This kind**—probably demonic spirits in general rather than a special type of demon—**can come out only** (lit., "is not able to come out by anything except ...") **by prayer.**

So what do we learn from this text?

We need to remember, first and foremost, our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the power of this dark world.

The goal of demonism is to destroy or distort the image of God in man.

Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Mk 9:20–24). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Third we have a response—and that is faith. Faith that nothing can stand against the power of God.

Forth, we demonstrate our faith through prayer, which signifies in action that we are completely dependent upon God, and trust God is more powerful than anything we can face.

Conclusion

I started this sermon by stating that all of us face “impossible” situations.

The question is will we rely upon our ourselves, our own strength, our own “beliefs” to navigate through them. We will wait nearly a lifetime as this boys father did? Or will we acknowledge spiritual realities, and come to God by faith, bringing our requests before God in prayer, and trusting, (and awaiting) His will to be done.

Nothing is impossible for those who believe, but our difficulty is our belief. It is always a right and proper request to God.

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I believe, help my unbelief.

George Washington faced an impossible situation in the 2nd year of the birth of our country.

Conclusion

Anxiously anticipating the quite premature delivery of our triplets, I will never forget the moment that the doctor looked at me and announced, “They’re all alive!” It was not a foregone conclusion (at least for one of them) and until that report, my wife and I were in suspense. All of the wishful thinking—even from certified medical professionals—could not alleviate that suspense, turning possibility into actuality. I could believe all I wanted in a successful delivery, but I had no promise to rely on, either from God or the doctors, and the intensity of my believing it had nothing to do with the state of affairs. My confidence developed entirely on the words that the doctor uttered. Similarly, the gospel is news because it reports a completed event. Faith does not make something true, but embraces the truth.

Michael Horton, The Gospel-Driven Life: Being Good News People in a Bad News World (Baker Books, 2009), pp. 123-124; submitted by Van Morris, Mount Washington, Kentucky