

## Mark 9:14-29

### “Miss-focused faith”

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#### I.     **Introduction**

When reading the Bible at times, it appears to have been written abstractly, as random events are placed next to each other without the seeming slightest connection. We could understand this when we consider that these human writers were not trained in penning novels but for us Christians this presents a difficulty. We believe the Bible to be authored by God and when seemingly random stories are placed next to each other without any visible connection, doubt as to its divine origins creeps in. Such is the difficulty in the account given by Mark of the demon possessed boy whom the disciples could not deliver. Before we can unravel this difficult story we are confronted with the question of: “*What does this story have to do with Peter, James and John witnessing Jesus’ transfiguration?*” The connection between these two stories seem as far apart as possible. But based upon verse 14 it is clear by Mark’s narrative that they are connected as this event takes place right at the foot of the Mountain as Jesus arrived with the three disciples. The four of them interrupt an on going scene as the remaining disciples were trying to be of service while facing the opposition both from the scribes who were present and the case its self.

As mentioned the gospel has made a turn as we are now on the road to Calvary and Mark lead by the Spirit of God has begun to answer the question as to, “*Why were*

*those who witnessed Jesus unaware that He was the Son of God.”* Last week we noted the confusion Peter, James and John had with regards to the 1<sup>st</sup> coming of Christ and His soon death, burial and resurrection. Here we note what happens when His followers fail to make the personal connection to His sacrifice on their behalf; it leads to a *paralysis of power*. As we shall soon discover in the remaining story it was not because of absences of faith but instead a *miss-focus of faith*. The connection is that miss-focus of faith has practical implications of *paralysis of power*!

## II. Vs. 14-19 Failure of the followers

Vs. 14-19 One of the rules of biblical interpretation is to always seek your interpretation when given within the passage your studying. Here in looking at the ineffectiveness of the disciples in casting out the demon from the boy we are told in the 19<sup>th</sup> verse by Jesus that their problem was “*faithlessness*”. But *that is a broad diagnosis* that will require us to dig further into this passage if we are going to understand who it was aimed at as well as what Jesus meant by it. There are several mitigating factors that seemed to make this case unique:

1. Vs. 14 First is the length of time that the disciples had been at this which is suggested in two statements: That as Jesus and the three disciples entered the scene there was a “*great multitude*” around them and that “*scribes were there disputing with the disciples*”. I for one am impressed with the *consistent and continual* effort put forth by the disciples, especially when you factor in a great amount of people observing their failure as well as the direct and constant opposition in the scribes who were disputing with them in the process. What this suggests to me is that the disciples were utterly *convinced of their inevitable success*. This means that *their failure had nothing to do with a lack of effort*, nor did it come from *a lack of faith in the process*. I make this observation based upon the text as well as observing humanity. Both the continual witness of the multitudes and the continual opposition of the scribes would have: *Put a halt in anyone who was not committed to the process or had lingering doubts of its eventual success!*
2. Vs. 15-18 It is equally clear that upon recognizing Jesus the people were “*greatly amazed*” at the lack of progress of the disciples and expected to see different

results now that He had arrived. It also appears in Jesus' response to the Scribes that He saw their involvement as a hindrance rather than a help to His disciples. When the spiritual dimension is placed next to the combination of the severity of the physical symptoms mentioned in verse 18 that masked epilepsy; with the self destructive spiritual possessed tendencies in verse 22, we see from a practical stand point that this case was unusual. It would be incorrect to make the leap in suggesting that all epilepsy is caused by demonic possession, instead of realizing that this peculiar case was masking its self with such symptoms. That combined with the father's answer to Jesus' inquiry as to the length of time that his boy had suffered being from childhood make this a very difficult case. We get a further understanding of this in Jesus' own words in verse 29 where He says, "***This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.***"

Vs. 19 Having made allowances with regards to the difficulty of the case Jesus goes to answering the fathers statement of verse 18 concerning the inability of the disciples to cast out the demon from his son. His initial statement is that the inability came about do to a "***faithless generation***" that though He had been among them still didn't understand the necessity of the continual personal connection to Him. We are left to our interpretive skills to determine who was included in the title of "*faithless generation*". I'm of the belief that this included all present: The **great multitude**, **scribes** and by the response of **the father** in verse 23-24 him as well. But as seen by Jesus response to **His disciple's** inquiry of verse 28 they were also included in this "*faithless generation*". It is the disciple's "*faithlessness*" that is the primary focus of the remainder of the passage. This is what is the great surprise of this section of scripture because ***the disciple's exhibited qualities that we normally associate with faith not faithlessness:***

- **Uninterrupted trust**: Even in the face of prolonged failure and fierce opposition.
- **Expectation of success**: They maintained this even when the results didn't match their continual effort. As noted, their surprise was that it had not succeeded as they were convinced that it would and apparently so much so that the process was not something that they doubted instead they wanted to know was missing that would have given them success.

### III. Vs. 20-27 Source of faith or success of faith?

Vs. 20-27 Before we get to deep into looking at the disciples faithless we are first given Jesus' addressing the father's faithlessness. At Jesus' request the young man is brought to Him where he manifests the physical symptoms already described by the father in verse 18. It is then that as I mentioned earlier Jesus like the "*Great Physician*" that He is asks the length of time that the patient has been manifesting these symptoms. The father replies since childhood then adds in the spiritual dimension to this of self destruction. The father then makes the plea, "***IF*** *You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.*" There are ***three things that stand out in this plea:***

- The father clearly **has doubts that anything can be done, as he uses the word "IF"**. There are several reasons for this confessed unbelief: The longevity and severity of his son's condition. As well as the failed attempts to offer any solution to any of the symptoms both physical as well as spiritual. And lastly, the failed attempt by Jesus own disciples to help his son and I assume that the father was only holding a slight hope that Jesus could do something that others were unable to do.
- Secondly I notice ***the desperation of the father has:*** He has given up on a cure and now is only trusting and hoping for a lessening of the symptoms as he asks, "if you can do **ANYTHING.**"
- The final thing I notice is that **the father's appeal is based upon the severity of the case not upon their worthiness** as he asks Jesus to have "*compassion on us and help us.*"

Vs. 23-24 In Jesus' response to the father the focus of Jesus reply is towards his unbelief and put's the doubt back on him saying, "*If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.*" The words believe are not in the original text although they are implied, instead Jesus uses a Jewish idiom "*If I can...?*". There is also a play on words in the Greek as Jesus says, "*If you CAN.....all things CAN BE*", then Jesus puts over the contrast of the "*anything*" of the father next to the "*all things*" of the Son of God. The father was willing to settle for "*anything*" and Jesus tells him that he need not settle for

“*anything*” when he is willing to trust Him for “*all things possible*”. This allows the father to address his own heart that has slipped into unbelief as he confesses this before Jesus. He asks Jesus to be continually helping his unbelief, a great request for us all. I wonder if the tears were shed not only because of the confession but also the realization that such doubt had caused him to lessen his expectation and hope of health and deliverance for his son?

Vs. 25-27 It seems as though Jesus wanted to avoid the spectacle of the young man’s deliverance and when he noticed the multitude running in curiosity He quickly rebuked the unclean spirit commanding him to come out and enter no more. But even with this command the demon came out kicking and screaming. So violent was the extraction that most on lookers believed the young man was dead, until Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up.

#### IV. Vs. 28-29 What or Who are you trusting in?

Vs. 28-29 This takes us back to the question as to the rebuke of the disciple’s faithlessness having noted that they exhibited certain qualities we associate with faith: **Uninterrupted trust** and **Expectation of success!** What this reveals is that the disciple’s faithlessness is in what their faith had been placed in, namely a process and outcome, instead of Jesus! Their faithlessness was misplaced not absent! They had witnessed Jesus healing multiple times and repeated what they had witnessed and expected the same results. **They had transferred their faith from the Person of Jesus to the process of healing and what was left was powerless religion instead of powerful relationship!** God’s works when we trust Him not the process or the outcome, those are never our concern and are an ineffective substitute for trusting only in Him. The power resides in

His presence who alone acts not in a formula we repeat! This is seen in His given explanation to their question of ineffectiveness in this case when Jesus tells them that “This kind can come out by ***NOTHING BUT PRAYER AND FASTING.***” The best manuscripts omit “*and fasting*” and it was added much later in an attempt by some translators to suggest a reason other than prayerlessness to explain the failure of the disciple’s. What was Jesus referring to when He made this statement? ***There is no direct indication that He had engaged in prayer prior to this. Further more in seems inconsistent with the context to suggest that Jesus is correcting the use of formulas by issuing a formula.*** Instead I believe what Jesus is saying that “*this kind*” requires continual lifestyle communication with Jesus as one would with their best friend and not on dependence upon a formula.