

Mark 9:14-29 "Down In the Valley Faith"
#3 Grace Church
9/17/17

Late November, on a beautiful Wednesday night, I saw with my own eyes a scene I had only dreamt about since as long as I was a child – and heard the words I had only dared to believe possible --

THE CHICAGO CUBS HAVE WON THE WORLD SERIES! CUBS WIN, CUBS WIN, CUBS WIN.

Years of futility, heartache, billy goats and nonsense curses were done away with as the Cubs scaled the highest mountain in baseball and won what some analysts are calling "The Greatest Game Ever Played".

108 years in the making. Down 3 games to 1. On the road. Giving up the lead in the bottom of the 8th with 4 outs to go – rallying to go ahead in the 10th after a rain delay – RAIN DELAY! – THANK YOU GOD FOR RAIN! – and then almost give it away again in the bottom of the 10th before making the final out --- as a lifelong Cubs fan I can say, "I have been to the top of the mountain – and it is good."

But here's what happens – here's what always happens – NO MATTER HOW GREAT IT IS AT THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN, YOU. MUST. ALWAYS. COME. DOWN.

Can't live there. You must come down.

That Wednesday night gave way to Thursday morning. I overslept because I forgot to set my alarm. My body ached from the previous night's adrenaline spikes like I had run a marathon or stepped in front of a truck. Kids were stressed and running late for

school. Both cars had to be taken into the car shop for repairs. I had multiple texts from people who were in need of prayer or counsel over difficult things in their lives and that was all before EIGHT AM.

Oh how the glory that shines from the top of the peak fades quickly as you get to the bottom of the base.

Mountaintop glory doesn't last long, does it? Great camp experience? Great vacation? Great dinner? It comes and goes. Back to the valley we go.

We're going to come down the mountain with Jesus in Mark 9:14-29. To see the kind of faith that works in the valley. That's where we live.

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. 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. 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." 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."

This passage begs for us to begin together in prayer.

PRAYER

SERMON:

Jesus, Peter, James, and John – transfiguration -- finally make their way down the mountain to rejoin the rest of the disciples and they find them – not singing praise songs -- group deep in an argument with scribes, surrounded by a crowd. Back to real life.

The mountaintop glory is a distant memory.

And everyone sort of stops when they see Jesus – like when you come through the door and your kids momentarily stop fighting to look you in the eyes– MOM DAD!– and they rush to see you. The crowd rushes to see Jesus – but Jesus asks "what they are fighting about". Here's what he finds 17-18:

A man in the crowd has come looking for healing for his son - v17. He has a demonic spirit that is absolutely devastating his life

– the spirit literally causes seizures that leave him mute – and throws him to the ground writhing, foaming at the mouth with his jaw clenched as his body goes rigid.

Listen, what a terrifying experience. I know some of you have experienced the fear of seizures. There's nothing to do -- nowhere to turn and no one else to help, the father makes his way with his son to Jesus with the hope that maybe Jesus could do something for him.

Just like we do we when we go to pray – we have a hope that Jesus will do something for us.

But Jesus was nowhere to be found, he was gone up the mountain– only his disciples were left. And so the dad ask the DISCIPLES to cast out the demon –But this time they couldn't. They tried, but they weren't able to do it.

This is the backstory -- and this is the cause for the argument between the scribes and disciples. We don't know why they are arguing! Mark doesn't tell us what they were debating – was it lawful to heal this man? Were they arguing about why he wasn't healed? In Mark 6 they healed two by two. We don't know!

But we do get Jesus' assessment of this whole scene --- as he comes down from the transfiguration, teaching his men the way of the cross -- and it's not pretty:

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.

Jesus looks at this scene that is filled with problems. There's a demon in front of him, he's writhing in front of him, there are

argumentative scribes in front of him, there are crowds waiting to see Rock Star Jesus.....and Jesus, who knows the hearts of men, sees a much deeper problem.

Here it is: The lack of faith. Jesus sees the lack of faith in all of them.

He doesn't say O CONFUSED CROWD! No -- O FAITHLESS GENERATION.

1. The lack of faith draws God's offense.

V19 19 And he answered them, "O faithless generation!!"

Who is the "them"? The man with the possessed child was talking, but Jesus answers THEM – who is the THEM – It's everyone in this scene. Everyone shows a lack of faith.

The scribes show a lack of faith by arguing with the disciples – rather than worship Jesus they attack Jesus.

The crowds show their lack of faith by being there in the first place. They come to be entertained by Jesus, rushing to greet him with great amazement like he's some kind of rock star. They don't want to worship Jesus, they want to entertained by Jesus.

Even the disciples show their lack of faith – we'll find out later that the reason they couldn't drive out the demon was because they didn't pray. They show their unbelief by looking to themselves for the resources they need instead of God. They are self-sufficient.

The biggest problem in the passage is not the demons, or scribes, or problems – it's the lack of faith in the person and presence and power of God.

And the same problem that plagued these people is the same problem that plagues us as well.

The biggest problem you have in this life is a lack of faith

We've all got problems. Our world is filled with many problems. We are at war with ISIS. Our national debt is 20 trillion dollars – out of control. We have corruption and dishonor at the highest levels of government.

And you have personal problems that are even more pressing -

Adults – you might have finances that are stretched beyond breaking, your body is breaking, you have your own parents who are getting older and getting sick and you are trying to take care of them and balance everything else. You've got the daily worries for your children's spiritual well-being and everyday seems more exhausting than the one before. I get it.

We all have problems.

Kids – you've got problems. Like friendships that have become strained, pressure to fit in, to look cool, to get your hair *JUST* right, avoid the bullies that pick on you, pressure to perform, and a self-doubt that is LARGE.

LISTEN WE ALL HAVE PROBLEMS.

But the most significant problems we face ---- are faith problems. It's true.

It's not the trial with cancer that is our deepest problem – its that we don't trust GOD to carry us in the midst of the cancer.

It's not the lonlieness that's our deepest challenge – It's that we don't believe God loves us and is present in the midst of the loneliness.

We don't believe that God is who He reveals Himself to be.
That he is Glorious, Great, Gracious, Good.

And so we argue with God instead of worship.

We escape into entertainment instead of pursuing holiness.

Maybe we try to do what God wants, but in our own strength.

And here's the point – this lack of faith is very offensive to God.

It's not just bad form, not just personally unsatisfying, it provokes righteous indignation.

“O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?”

Perhaps you have all sorts of reason why they are angry with God – I get it. God let you down. You think he failed you. You wanted something to happen in your life and it didn't. You prayed and God said no. So you're angry with God and that's ok in your mind – its legit.

Let me ask you this: DOES GOD HAVE ANY REASONS TO BE INDIGNANT WITH YOU?

FOR BELIEVING HIS POWER to be SO WEAK?

FOR CONSIDERING HIS PROMISES TO BE A LIE?

FOR TREASURING HIS LOVE SO LITTLE?

Does God have a reason to be indignant with you?

ROMANS 14:23

For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin

There is one man in this scene who does have a measure of faith – it's the father who brought the boy. We are going to consider the exercise of faith, point 2.

2. The exercise of faith draws on the power of God

Jesus instructs the crowd to bring him the boy. **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.

You ever go to the doctor half worried that when you get there you'll feel better than before and the doctor will think nothing is wrong? You almost want to sweats to happen so it can validate your concern?

This scene is playing out just like the dad said – the demon sees Jesus and it throws the boy down on the ground and it thrashes him about violently.

I bet you the crowd boy – at the site of the boy -- he began to the backup at the sight of the convulsing boy. Our instinct would be to backup – or rush to help him if you have medical training.

Jesus doesn't do either. He's in no rush to act. He asks questions. He wants to know more. He wants to understand the

impact on this family and on this boy.

21 And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?"

And he said, "From childhood. 22 And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him.

SOMETHING VERY CRUCIAL IS BEING REVEALED IN THE STORY THAT HITS CLOSE TO HOME IN OUR LIVES. The father wants Jesus to take the demon out of the boy – of course he would! It's destroying his son's life!

But Jesus doesn't just want to take the demon out – but FAITH IN.

What a critical point.

So often when we pray, we pray to ask God to fix things – fix my problem. Give me a better life! Give me more comfort! Take away the heartache, the drama. On Tuesday I have small surgery

Fixing our problems is not God's highest priority. Don't doubt for a second that he can do it -- Jesus could have healed this boy the moment the writhing began.

God can fix all of your problems on the spot.

-- **God can mend that relationship on the spot** – soften the heart, bring repentance, sorrow, forgiveness, He can do that.

-- **God can provide in that situation on the spot** – put it on someone's heart to give you money, bring a buyer for your house, open up a slot in that class, give the decision maker kindness toward you, He can do that.

-- **God can heal you from your sickness on the spot** – or give a moment of wisdom to a doctor to catch something that no one else

saw – I got diagnosed with melanoma, I have a small excising surgery on Tuesday, how no idea I had cancer all summer. He can do that.

And we should pray for that! Think with me on the Lord's prayer: THY KINGDOM COME THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN – where there is no sickness no shame.

But --- fixing our problems in this life is not His GREATEST DESIRE – he wants to build in us a faith that is battle tested – forged in the refiners fire – a confidence in HIM that works even in the valley.

And the awesome news of the gospel is that Jesus stands ready to meet you – each one of you --- on one HUGE condition – that you believe He is able and willing. The father continues on with Jesus:

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.”

IF YOU CAN??? IF YOU CAN??? What kind of faith is that?? IF YOU CAN??

JESUS CAN DO EVERYTHING. The issue isn't Jesus' capacity for power – that generator is full. To the brim, overflowing. The issue is how to draw off of that power --- and Jesus makes it super clear how in v23:

You must believe. All things are possible for one who believes. That's what faith is – it's belief....and not just believe in belief

And its not just the power of positive thinking – thinking positive is not bad. Joe Madden is the manager of the Cubs and he

was the perfect guy for them this year – and when he was pressed as to how he overcame 108 years of futility and all of the nonsense about the curse, here's what he said:

"Everybody's waiting for the other shoe to drop," Maddon said. "And you've got to expect something good to happen as opposed to that.

I appreciate the cup is half full mentality, but that's a faith that's grounded in nothing. Cubs fans know that best.

The kind of faith that Jesus is talking about here is not some kind of wishful thinking, but its grounded in the knowledge of the TRUE AND LIVING GOD – KING JESUS, the Son of God with all of his power and benefits of the kingdom.

The one who believes in me, in all that I am and all that I bring – for that one all things are possible.

That's where our faith should be grounded.

3. The exercise of faith draws on the power of God.

ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE FOR THE ONE WHO BELIEVES. ALL THINGS. ALL THINGS.

Now I must say – this is the kind of statement that works really well for a Hallmark card or for a missions promo video – oh we love this – YOU READY FOR THIS!?!?

ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE FOR THE ONE WHO BELIEVES!! Play some Newsboys behind that.....BOOM! We're going to convert the nations!

But actually, for anyone who is being honest with themselves,

this verse can be demoralizing. It's unattainable.

It calls for a kind of faith that seems foreign to most of us.

Because most of us struggle to consistently believe God is good. I do. Do you?

If you do believe that God is good and God works all things together for good for those who love him, then why do you ever get angry?

God's being good to let your child mouth off to you like that, huh? God's being good to let your house flood, huh? God's being good to let you get teased like that?

Every time you get angry, cynical, critical, mean spirited, frustrated, and cold, you are saying, even just in a small way, "I DON'T BELIEVE YOU ARE EXACTLY WHO YOU SAY YOU ARE"

Oh God is that good that He works good out of floods and teasing.

But if PERFECT faith is what you need to draw on the power of God, the lights on most of our houses are dangerously dim.

But verse 24 might be the most encouraging verse in this section, the entire gospel of Mark. BECAUSE ON HEARING THIS HALLMARK SENTENCE. The father cries out

24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

This I can understand. This I can relate to. This is my daily, sometimes hourly, sometimes moment by moment prayer –

GOD I BELIEVE – that's why I'm here praying. BUT I NEED MORE HELP TO BELIEVE.

He believes! His faith is real -- The man was desperate enough to come to Jesus with the boy, But his faith is mixed in with doubt! He acknowledges that He struggles to believe!

At a wedding ceremony, a couple might choose to symbolize their marriage with unity sand – two different colors, poured into one container so that the blue and the white mix together and can't ever be separated. That's the picture I see here in this Father.

It's not a pure faith, but it is a real faith, just like ours.

Can you see yourself in this Father's response?

I believe that I'm forgiven – but I still struggle with guilt and forgiving myself.

I believe that God is powerful – but I still struggle not to try and control every relationship.

I believe that God is wise – but I still struggle with anger and bitterness over all the disappointments in my life.

Jesus doesn't demand a perfect faith – but a sincere one. A real one. One that is even willing to admit when its weak – HELP ME IN MY UNBELIEF.

That alone is a statement of faith that honors Christ – and WHEN WE EXERCISE FAITH IN THE PERSON AND PRESENCE AND POWER OF JESUS CHRIST --- WE WILL DRAW UPON THE POWER OF GOD. HE WILL ACT IN SOME WAY FOR OUR GOOD. Maybe not he we always want - -but he hears us and He will move. HE WILL RESPOND.

And in this case it's dramatic.

V 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."

When Jesus moves, it is decisive, it is final, it is done.

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."

Sometimes the outworking of our faith leaves us feeling and looking like we're dead. Like its all been lost!

27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

And yet Jesus didn't kill the boy – he liberated him. He freed him. He gave him a new life - Though it seemed to kill him, it was the birth of new life.

That's what FAITH IN CHRIST PRODUCES – it gives us freedom from our sin, pardon for our guilt, a covering for our shame, a hope for the future, a blessed assurance that Jesus is mine.

And we don't have to simply anchor our hope in the stories of God being good to someone else --- this whole story is about God doing good to us. We anchor our hope in the story of God being good to us through the gospel. Jesus' death and resurrection are the twin pillars upon which the house of our faith rests. Jesus died for my sins because he loves me – Jesus rose to proclaim that the payment was accepted.

And on THAT WE REST OUR HOPES FOR EVERY MOMENT IN THE FUTURE! That has God has been exceedingly, lavishing good to us in the gospel.

How is your faith doing this morning? Not your mountain-top faith – not your Cubs have won the world series faith? But your in the valley faith? Are you clinging to the promises that Jesus has assured you of?

Maybe a better question is -- How will you know??

3. The evidence of our faith is that we draw near to God

The passage closes with Jesus and his disciples inside a house and they ask about the boy – why they couldn't do what Jesus did? just like they did in chapter six when they went out in pairs of two and did miracles in Jesus name.

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"

You mean – the disciples didn't pray? That's what Jesus is saying. They tried to cast this demon out without DRAWING UPON GOD TO DO IT. Well, no wonder it failed.

Faith draws power by drawing near to God. Faith connects us to the endless stream of power and resource in the Creator of the Heavens and Earth.

It postures us to receive his help. And It's so easy to do but its so hard for us to do if we're proud or self-sufficient.

What does it take for you to reach out to God in prayer? SOMETHING MASSIVE?? A family member who is dying? But other than that, you're good?

Do your prayers show the kind of faith that works all day long?

There were points over this last year where I had to battle for faith moment by moment. I had to consciously draw near to God I had to say to my own soul – soul you need to pray. And I needed help in doing that.

God uses the church to help us build our faith – it's not a country club. The church is a faith building enterprise – where we come in the presence of the mighty God, and we lift up our voices in song, and where we sit under the authority of God's word, where we gather around each other in support and care, and we encourage each other that God is at work, we confront each other when we're going off the path, and we keep ourselves tethered to Christ.

That's how God perseveres the saints to the very end. God uses the church to do that.

Because the reality is: We don't live on the top of the mountain. We live in the valley.

We need more than just a faith that works on the mountain – we need a faith that works in the valley.