

**\*READ Mark 8:2-5\***

In our last study, we noted how so much of what takes place in what we call The Transfiguration calls our attention back to Moses and the great exodus in which he led Israel. We noted this surely being Mark's desire for the reader to recognize that Jesus is now assuming a Moses-like role in leading all people out of the captivity of sin and into the promised land of a new covenant with God. Yet, the similarities between the mountain top experience of Moses and the mountain top experience of Jesus and His closest disciples are not over as they descend the mountain together.

**Exodus 32** tells of Moses's descent from the incredible experience of being in God's presence into a scene of absolute chaos as God's people have themselves descended into idolatry that involved a gold calf molded from the rings of the people. It is clear from the text that the people have lost faith and confidence in God and their leader Moses, and it leads them into manifesting such unbelief through the acknowledging this calf as the god who led them up from Egypt. (**Exodus 32:4**)

While Jesus doesn't descend into a scene of idolatry, He does still descend into a mess that stems from unbelief. Yet, the presence of unbelief shouldn't surprise us much since it has been a main focal point of much of this Gospel account. That focus is going to continue in our study this morning as we look at the text of **Mark 9:14-32**. The deficiencies of the disciples and other people and the all-sufficiency of Jesus will be on full display as we progress through this study. Let's begin by reading the text, and then we'll work our way through what we have read.

**Mark 9:14-32****A. The Struggle Of Unbelief (Mark 9:14-18)**

1. While Peter, James, and John are probably still riding that incredible high of seeing Moses and Elijah right along side the glorious Jesus and hearing the very voice of God exalting Jesus, the rest of the Apostles are left struggling without their Rabbi alongside them. While they are waiting at the foot of the mountain, a man brings his demon-possessed son to the Apostles of Jesus and beg that they heal his son because he had undergone such a horrible ordeal because of the torment of this unclean spirit. No doubt the fame and reputation of Jesus and His Apostles has reached the ears of so many in the surrounding regions, and this desperate dad is searching for any healing that might be brought to his ailing son. Sadly, the Apostle are not able to cast out the demon, and this dad is left ailing for his son.
2. Not only do the Apostles fail, but they fail in the presence of some scribes who must be salivating at the opportunity to use this against Jesus. He is this new teacher who has accrued such a following because of His teachings and miraculous deeds, but here they are able to find His closest pupils who themselves are not able to replicate His incredible deeds...even though they have been endowed with power to do such things! We can't claim they simply did not have the power because they had been specifically given power over unclean spirits and demons by Jesus back in **Mark 6:7,13**, "*He summoned the Twelve and began to send them out in pairs and gave them authority over unclean spirits...They drove out many demons, anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.*" What gives? Why have they failed in something they should have been able to do? Only questions, uncertainty, and frustration can be found in this situation.
3. This is the scene Jesus enters back into following the transfiguration scene, and it seems like there might have still been some kind of residual glory left on Jesus since the people who finally saw Him were amazed by His presence. I can only guess they were amazed by how He looked since this doesn't seem to be the response of other people when they see Jesus. Nonetheless, He asks what is going on, and the father of the boy steps forward and explains

the situation to Jesus. He speaks of the ailment of his son, his efforts to have him healed, and the failures of Jesus Apostles to get the job done. It is at this point that Jesus laments the root issue being that of unbelief. Every party in this situation was guilty of unbelief, and that needed to change if they were going to experience the glory of Jesus.

## B. Greater Belief Required (Mark 9:19-27)

1. Again, let's recall the issue of unbelief that has been highlighted in this section of Mark's Gospel (from **6:30** onward), specifically on the part of the Apostles.
  - a) They are not able to truly appreciate the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 or the significance of Jesus walking on the water in the storm because their hearts were hardened. (**Mark 6:30-52**) This leads to them again failing to recognize Jesus's ability to provide for their needs during the second miraculous feeding in **Mark 8:1-10**.
  - b) They completely whiff on Jesus's warnings concerning the leaven of the Pharisees & Herod, and Jesus again ties that into their inability to understand the miraculous feedings. (**8:11-21**)
  - c) Even when they have a highlight moment where they are able to confess Jesus as the Son of God, Christ, & Messiah...they turn right around and deny that Jesus is going to have to endure what God has destined for Him to endure. (**8:27-33**)
2. The Apostles understood to some degree, but they were still on that journey to get closer to where they needed to be. Again, we recognize Jesus's unique two-staged healing of the blindman as a miraculous manifestation of this progress they were trying to make. However, they still had a ways to go, and unfortunately this man and his son were having to suffer the consequences of their present unbelief.
3. Yet, we're also going to see some struggle of belief on the part of the desperate dad. As Jesus is speaking to him about this situation he states, "*But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.*" (**9:22**) From this man's perspective, he wasn't exactly convinced that Jesus could help him on account of His disciples already failing. However, Jesus calls him on this questioning of the ability of Jesus Himself. "*If you can?*", Jesus replies with. If?? The reality is this wasn't a question at all on Jesus's part concerning what He was capable of. The onus in this situation was completely upon the man's belief in Jesus. It was also upon the Apostles because apparently they themselves were not where they needed to be in their faiths in order to accomplish what this man had come to them to do. "*Everything is possible for the one who believes*" is Jesus's response to this man. In other words, "Friend, I am capable of doing anything I want...but do you believe this to be the case? Do you trust that I am able and willing to do such a thing?"
4. To this man's credit, he states that he does believe, but he also recognizes that his belief has a long way to go. He not only begs for his son to be healed, but he also begs for Jesus to help him grow stronger in his belief. Jesus responds by commanding the demon to come out of the boy, which it does after sending the boy into one final convulsion that results in him looking like a lifeless copse. Jesus proceeds to take the boy by the hand, raises him up, and sends him on his way healed with his dad. After a great ordeal, this man's belief in Jesus and his desire for even greater belief was surely fulfilled after seeing his son restored.

## C. The Source Of Greater Belief (Mark 9:28,29)

1. Yet, the struggles with the Apostles continue for they ask Jesus in a more private setting, "*Why couldn't we drive it out?*" (**28**) It seems that Jesus has already answered that question based upon what He has previously said in **9:19**, "*You unbelieving generation, how long will I be with you? How long must I put up with you?*" This rebuke of unbelief seems to be something that applied to just about everyone in that situation. We know the scribes did not

believe in Jesus for they were constantly searching for some way in which they could discredit Him. The dad shows his lack of belief in seemingly being unsure as to whether or not Jesus could or even cared to help his son. And then there are the Apostles who were the cause of this fiasco based upon their inability to cast out the unclean spirit in the first place. There is plenty of unbelieving blame to go around, but it begins with the Apostles, and Jesus is now going to tell them how to grow past this unbelief...prayer.

2. These men needed to be consistent in prayer because prayer would take the attention off of themselves and put it where it needed to be...on God. Even the way they ask the question betrays their seemingly self-focused mindset, "**Why couldn't we drive it out?**" It wasn't about their power! It was about the power of God to accomplish great things through them. The authority and power rested completely upon God, and they needed to be reminded of their need to trust fully in what He could and would do through them based upon their belief.
3. Again, let's think about it through the perspective of other miracles we have seen thus far and how faith and belief were at the center of these miraculous occasions. Even going all the way back to the first chapter of Mark we see:
  - a) The leprous man of **Mark 1:39-45** believed Jesus had the power to cleanse him.
  - b) The friends of the paralyzed man believed in Jesus's power and went through all the trouble to lower him down through the roof to be in front of Jesus. (**2:1-12**)
  - c) Jairus having faith in Jesus by going to Him for the healing of his daughter. (**5:21-42**)
  - d) The woman suffering from bleeding believed that even just a touch of Jesus's garment would heal her. (**5:25-34**)
  - e) The Gentile mother showed tremendous belief in the ability of Jesus to heal her daughter. (**7:24-30**)
  - f) More Gentiles show their belief in Jesus's ability to heal their friend who is deaf & mute. (**7:31-37**)
4. Time and time again we see the subjects of these incredible miracles performed by Jesus exhibiting tremendous amounts of belief and faith in what Jesus is capable of doing. They trust that He can do far more than they can even imagine as possible...yet they still believe He is capable which is why so many people sought him out and responded with great faith!
5. So how could Jesus's Apostles come to have the same type of belief in who Jesus was that? How could they grow and develop this belief? Jesus says such could come by them praying...but why praying? It would be through their prayer and devotion to God that they could express their fervent trust in God's power to accomplish His will through them! They were in need to giving more time and attention to the Lord as the source of them doing what they were expected to do as Jesus's Apostles. I can only assume they had not been praying as they ought because then it seems this wouldn't have been the problem it appeared to be. If they wanted to have greater faith then they needed to go to the one who was the source of their faith to begin with. They needed to devote themselves to persistent prayer!

#### D. The Apostles' Continued Struggle (Mark 9:30-32)

1. This apparent need arose not only because they were struggling in this regard, but they continued to struggle in their understanding of who Jesus was and what He was destined to endure as the Son of Man. They depart from this place and make their way though Galilee, but Jesus doesn't want people to know they are there. This seems to be on account of Him wanting to devote time to continuing to reinforce to His Apostles what He is soon to endure. He is very specific in the fact that He will be betrayed, killed, and yet raised on the third day.

2. Yet, Mark tells us they continued in their misunderstanding as to what exactly Jesus meant by all of this. Again, we've seen this before as Peter tries to rebuke Jesus for saying such things, and even after that they still are not understanding. While they should have continued to strive for the proper understanding by fleshing this out with Jesus, they instead remain silent and don't ask Him because "*they were afraid to ask Him.*" Again, this is not the first time we have seen this fear from the Apostles. They were afraid in both of the sea situations where Jesus displayed His miraculous power (**4:40 & 6:50**). They feared and let that fear grip them in unbelief. Fear is the enemy of belief in God and hinders the power He has that could work within us. Jesus told Jairus to not be afraid but to believe in **5:36**. The woman with the issue of bleeding feared, but sought to overcome that fear by going to Jesus and confessing that it was she who touched Him.
3. Fear can either cause people to move further away from God or it can cause them to seek Him in order to overcome that fear. In this moment, the fear of the Apostles was causing them to be hindered in greater faith, belief, and understanding, and it seems this is why Jesus tells them they are in need of prayer. They needed to pray and seek courage and understanding from God which would lead them closer to be where Jesus expected them to be. Yet, we recognize this was a process, and they still have more of this story of their faiths to be written.

### **Application Questions**

#### **A. Does my behavior or mindset betray that I don't believe in God as I should?**

1. With all of this being said from this text, we would do well to consider our own belief in Jesus. It is easy to say we believe in Jesus and the power He possesses, but would our behavior and mindset be consistent with that type of thinking? Sure we say and truly do acknowledge Jesus as holding the title as the Son of God and God Himself, but are we to the point in our faith where that has a very obvious impact on how we live and the way we think?
2. Fear and worry are major factors in this text...are they staples within our lives? We all recognize there are a number of legitimate facets of our lives that can cause fear and worry. We are obviously worried about the current pandemic situation. We are worried about the direction our society and culture are moving in. We are worried about a number of things that are connected to these things and we recognize the very real impact they can have upon our lives...but do we recognize the ability of our God to have complete control over such things? Do we recognize that none of these things are outside of God's control? None of these things will overpower Him, and therefore none of these things can over power us if we are truly believing and trusting in His power and ability to sustain us and our faiths through even the darkest of situations? Do we need to be reminded as Jairus was, "*Don't be afraid. Only believe!*"?
3. Do we push God to the background and try to work through these things on our own? Do we try to fight against the worries and fears on our own strength? Do we find ourselves constantly beat down and tired because we are trying to do this on our own? If we find ourselves in this situation then we must recognize our shortcomings in our belief and beg God to help our unbelief! There is no way to overcome except in this way. Only through throwing ourselves at the feet of God and relying upon His grace, mercy, and strength can we overcome and succeed. But this leads to our second question...

#### **B. Does prayer have the proper place in my life that it should?**

1. If Jesus Himself found it necessary and beneficial to sneak away from time to time to dedicate Himself in prayer to His Father then certainly we would do well to do the same. However, we might not give the proper attention to prayer because we quantify successful prayer in the wrong way. I think, because I'm guilty of this, as seeing prayer as being beneficial when that

which I pray for happens. I pray for healing for a person, and I see that prayer as being good only if that person is healed. I see prayer as being beneficial only if I am able to get through a certain situation I have prayed for in the way I desire.

2. Friends, let me suggest this is the complete wrong way to determine whether or not time spent in prayer is time well spent. Instead, let me suggest that time spent in prayer that is spent with an honest and sincere heart that only desires to pour ourselves out before God and lay all of our cares and worries upon Him is good prayer. We must recognize that taking our burdens in life to God in prayer in and of itself is a success because we are showing our trust in His ability to do all things well. The reality is we might not receive the outcome we desire, but if we truly trust in God then we will accept that things are working just as He sees fit for them to work out. We don't like to hear that because we think we know the best way, but we cannot comprehend the all-knowing mind of God who is able to carry out His perfect will in this world. We simply need to trust, pray, and believe. There is nothing outside of His control. There is nothing He cannot do. Do we show that through how often and how fervently we pray? May we follow the words of Jude as he wrote, "*But you, dear friends, as you build yourselves up in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting expectantly for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life.*" (**Jude 20,21**)

**Main Point/Conclusion:** God's ability is infinite. The only thing lacking is our belief.

*Lord, help our unbelief!*

Just like the Apostles, each of us still has room and often much room to improve in our belief and trust in Jesus. We often want to judge the faithfulness of God based upon how well things are going in our lives, but we must grow past that and allow Him to help our unbelief by recognizing His faithfulness will be seen in our persevering in faith. Regardless of the test that stands before us, we can find success by continuing to trust in Him, remaining faithful, and showing that belief through a commitment to obey Him in all things. As we continue through this difficult time in our lives, may we be a people who are constant in prayer and ever growing in our belief and trust in God to see us through until the end. Though we believe already...may our God continue to help us grow past our points of weakness and unbelief. He can and He will if only we will trust Him through prayer for such blessings every single day. The great servant Jesus came to help the unbelief of those before Him...may He continue to help our unbelief, as well.