

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 2/20/05 Brad Brandt

Mark 9:14-32 "Real Faith in the Real World"*

Main Idea: The Lord is interested in developing real faith in the real world. By healing a demon-possessed boy in Mark 9:14-32, He reminds us of three steps involved in making real faith a reality in our lives.

- I. The Lord reminds us of our weakness (14-19).
 - A. The disciples faced a problem (14-18).
 1. They saw a father in distress.
 2. They saw a boy in bondage.
 3. They saw critics who challenged them.
 - B. Jesus exposed the real problem (19).
 1. We tend to believe only what we can see.
 2. We need real faith.
 - II. The Lord reminds us of His sufficiency (20-27).
 - A. Jesus taught the father about faith (20-24).
 1. We need more than verbal faith.
 2. We need to face our doubts.
 3. We need Jesus to help us overcome our unbelief.
 - B. Jesus demonstrated why we can believe Him (25-27).
 1. He is powerful.
 2. He is compassionate.
 3. He finishes what He starts.
 - III. The Lord reminds us of our need for Him (28-32).
 - A. We aren't sufficient (28-29).
 1. If we really believe that, we'll pray.
 2. If we pray, we'll see Him do what He alone can do.
 - B. We need a Savior (30-32).
 1. We need Him to teach us.
 2. We need Him to save us.
- Make It Personal: If you want to make sure you have a real faith...
1. Make sure you have believed in Jesus.
 2. Make sure you are believing in Jesus.

Kent Hughes writes: "In the Vatican Gallery hangs Raphael's last painting, which some think to be his greatest. It is entitled, *The Transfiguration*. The uppermost part pictures the transfigured form of Jesus, with Moses on the left and Elijah on his right. On the next level are the three disciples, Peter, James, and John, recently awakened and shielding their eyes from Jesus' blinding brilliance. Then, on the ground level, is a poor demon-possessed boy, his mouth hideously gaping with wild ravings. At his side is his desperate father. Surrounding him are the rest of the disciples, some of whom are pointing upward to the glowing figure of Christ—who will be the boy's only answer. Raphael has brilliantly captured something of the overwhelming contrast between the glorious Mountain of Transfiguration and the troubled world waiting below."

It's great up on the mountain. When you're on the mountain you feel God's presence. But down in the valley it's *reality*. In the real world children get sick, critics challenge you, and the attack of the evil one is vicious. That's exactly what the disciples learned in Mark 9.

In the first part of Mark 9 Jesus permitted three of His disciples to go with Him up on a mountain and there see a demonstration of His glory. He was transfigured right before their very eyes. They saw Him in His

radiant splendor, and even heard the Father's voice, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!"

It was a great moment, a mountain-top moment for the disciples. Then they headed down the mountain. Things that were very clear up on the mountain all of the sudden weren't so clear down in the valley.

It's one thing to talk about how *much* the Lord means to you and how much you believe in Him... when you're *up on the mountain*. It's another thing, however, to see what the Lord means to you down in the valley, down in the real world.

Think of it this way. Sunday is a mountain-top day for Christians. On Sunday we gather with God's people, secluded from the world, sing songs, hear the teaching of God's Word, and talk about how important the Lord is to us. We feel His presence. *On Sunday*. Then Monday comes. Oh, we really believe in the Lord... *on Sunday*. But ask us on Monday, or Tuesday, or Friday. Ask us then. Better yet, look at our lives on those days and see how real the Lord is when we're down in the valley, out in the real world.

What's missing? It's what Jesus teaches us about in Mark 9. *Real faith*. We may have a "Sunday faith," but Sunday-faith doesn't work the other six days.

A man sentenced to death obtained a reprieve by assuring the king he would teach his majesty's horse to fly within the year--on the condition that if he didn't succeed, he would be put to death at the end of the year. "Within a year," the man explained later, "the king may die, or I may die, or the horse may die. Furthermore, in a year, who knows? Maybe the horse will learn to fly."

That's kind of how some people view faith. Talk to them on Sunday, "Sure, I believe in the Lord. He's great." But will He make a difference in your life down in the valley this week? "I don't know, but He's the best option I've seen so far."

Know this, dear friends. *The Lord is interested in developing real faith in the real world*. How does He do it? We'll find out from God's Word this morning.

By healing a demon-possessed boy in Mark 9:14-32, He reminds us of three steps that are involved in making real faith a reality in our lives.

I. The Lord reminds us of our weakness (14-19).

Verse 14 gives the context, "When they came to the other disciples." *They* refers to Jesus, Peter, James, and John. They just left the mountain, probably Mount Hermon, and were rejoining the other nine disciples. Two things happened.

A. The disciples faced a problem (14-18). "When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. 'What are you arguing with them about?' he asked. A man in the crowd answered, 'Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.'"

Wiersbe remarks, "In one day, a disciple can move from the glory of heaven to the attacks of hell." The disciples had enjoyed some good days since they began to follow Jesus, but so far this wasn't one of them. Their problem was threefold.

1. *They saw a father in distress*. What was his name? Where did he live? Did he have a wife? We're not told. We do know he made the effort to bring his son to Jesus for healing but had to settle for His disciples, and to his dismay, try as they might they failed to help him. And he told Jesus as much, "I asked your disciples to

drive out the spirit, but they could not." In Luke's account his plea is more intense, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child." Matthew's account indicates that the man fell on his knees before Jesus.

2. *They saw a boy in bondage.* The problem? He was possessed by an evil spirit, a demon that was ruining his life. The demon had made the boy mute and also caused him to go into severe epileptic-like seizures. Luke elaborates on the father's description (Luke 9:39), "A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him."

Yes, Satan is a destroyer. His aim is to get at God by destroying the image of God.

3. *They saw critics who challenged them.* Notice verse 14 again, "When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them." Back in chapter 3 the Jewish teachers of the law ("scribes") made it clear what they thought of Jesus. "He is possessed by Beelzebub!" they said (3:22). The critics had been hounding Jesus since then trying to expose Him.

Here we see the scribes heckling the nine disciples following their failed attempt to help the mute boy:

"You say your Master is so powerful?" they jabbed.

"He IS powerful," the disciples shot back.

"Sure doesn't look like it to us. If He's so powerful, prove it. Set that boy free!"

"Well, we're trying but something's not working today. We're not sure what, but something's wrong."

"We'll tell you what's wrong," the scribes retorted. "YOU are wrong. You are frauds. This Jesus you are following is a fraud!"

No, things weren't going too well for the disciples that day. The disciples faced a problem they couldn't solve.

It was at that point that Jesus showed up, right in the middle of this argument. "What are you arguing with them about?" Jesus asked His disciples. How they replied, Mark doesn't tell us. Mark indicates that the demon-possessed boy's father answered Jesus' question, explaining about his son and the disciples' failure to help.

Then Jesus spoke again, and in so doing He...

B. Jesus exposed the real problem (19). "'O unbelieving generation,' Jesus replied, 'how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.'"

With those words Jesus exposed the real problem. *O unbelieving generation.* It was a faith predicament, a lack of faith to be precise. Whose unbelief does Jesus have in mind? The disciples'? The father's? The scribes'? He doesn't specify and since we don't have video replay in the Scriptures we don't know who He made eye contact with—perhaps all of the above.

Who specifically Jesus had in mind at this point, we can't be sure. Of this we can. We all struggle with the same fundamental problem Jesus exposed that day. Here's why.

1. *We tend to believe only what we can see.* We're like Thomas (John 20:25), "*Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.*" See it, believe it, that's our tendency. That's also why we do well when we're up on the mountain, when we "see"

the evidence of God's presence. But if we're going to live for the Lord down in the valley, we need more than Sunday faith.

2. *We need real faith.* "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and *certain of what we do not see* (Heb 11:1)." Real faith is being confident that God will do what He said He would do. It's based on God's promise, not the feeling of His presence.

I read that the African impala can jump to a height of over 10 feet and cover a distance of greater than 30 feet. Yet these magnificent creatures can be kept in an enclosure in any zoo with a 3-foot wall. The animals will not jump if they cannot see where their feet will fall.

George Mueller once said, "Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends."

Here's where real faith begins, by recognizing our weakness. As long as we foolishly think we're strong, we'll never see how great He is, and therefore, we'll never exercise real faith in the real world. Sunday faith, maybe, but not real faith. Here's how the Lord develops real faith in His people. First, the Lord reminds us of our weakness.

II. The Lord reminds us of His sufficiency (20-27).

Notice again Jesus' command at the end of verse 19, "Bring the boy to me." It's amazing to watch our Master. He's heading for the cross, but He's willing to take time to help a boy in need. Barclay puts it this way, "He had come into the world to save the world, and yet he could give himself in his entirety to the helping of one single person."

It's so much easier for us to preach to the mass and tell sinners that God loves them. It's much harder to show God's love to one not-so-very-lovely sinner.

In the following scene, we learn about Jesus' sufficiency by watching what He did, first with the father, and then with the mute boy.

A. Jesus taught the father about faith (20-24). Verse 20—"So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth." Cole remarks, "It was the impotent rage of the defeated enemy, an unwilling acknowledgment of the status and authority of Jesus."

Verse 21—"Jesus asked the boy's father, 'How long has he been like this?' 'From childhood,' he answered." Keep in mind Jesus doesn't ask questions for His own sake. The omniscient Savior doesn't need information. When He asks a question it's for teaching purposes.

Verse 22—The father continues: "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him." Take a hard look at those words. We seem to have lost sight these days of what this father knew all too well. The evil one is a killer. He and his wicked imps have one agenda when it comes to mankind, a destructive one. He seeks to enslave, trap, hurt, and ultimately kill men and women, boys and girls.

If a killer is in the neighborhood, you're going to take steps to keep him out of your house, aren't you? You're going to be vigilant. You're going to lock your doors and windows for you know your life is at stake.

The fact is, there is a killer in your neighborhood, the evil one himself. What kind of precautions are you taking to defend yourself and your family? Are you memorizing God's Word? Are you putting on the armor of God? Ephesians 6:11 tells us plainly we need God's armor in order to "take our stand against the devil's schemes."

Note that word "schemes." The devil uses subtle tactics to attack our families. He doesn't shout, "Here I am! You better lock your door if you don't want me to enter!" He masquerades. He captivates. He seeks to appear innocent. He uses *schemes*.

What kind of schemes? The term is plural for his approach is multifaceted. He uses lots of things to distract us from thinking about the Lord and what we have if we know the Lord (our armor). Like what? A big one is entertainment. It frightens me to see how little discernment we often use in our choices of the movies we watch, the music we listen to, and the material we read.

Have you noticed how our culture not only practices evil, but now glorifies evil? How can we call something entertainment when it glorifies that for which our Savior died? Jesus died for fornicators and adulterers and liars and blasphemers and drunkards. He died to set people free from their sins. How can we who have been set free choose to bring right into our living room and car stereos the very sins that once enslaved us, and call it *entertainment*?

See his intention, my friend. See that boy rolling on the ground, foaming at the mouth. The evil one is a killer, and if you let him he will destroy you.

You say, "Can we resist him?" Yes, but Sunday-faith won't do. It takes *real faith*. That's what Ephesians 6:16 makes clear, "In addition to all this, take up the *shield of faith*, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." Giving lip-service to Jesus is like going into battle with a plastic sword. If you want to stand, you can, but you must take up the *shield of faith*. Jesus defeated the evil one at the cross and by trusting in Jesus you can stand. Real faith is like a bulletproof shield.

Perhaps you're thinking, "I'm not sure I have that kind of faith. Is there hope for me?" Yes, there's hope. You're not alone. Watch what Jesus did with the father in our story.

Verse 22 again, the father speaks to Jesus—"But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." Here's a father who certainly isn't a faith hero. He's got more doubts than hopes at this point. But notice how Jesus helped him.

Verse 23—"If you can't?" said Jesus. 'Everything is possible for him who believes.' Faith doesn't use qualifiers like "if." You either believe or you don't believe, and if you believe *everything is possible*.

Be careful. Many have abused this verse, ripping it from its context. Some folks teach that faith can control God, that if you believe something hard enough then God must respond. You can manipulate God if your faith is strong enough. But, as Hughes observes, "That is man-made, man-centered religion. The fact is, faith must never go farther than God's clear promises, for 'whatever goes beyond God's Word is not faith, but something else assuming its appearance.'"

Interestingly, the disciples had *expected* the boy to be healed by their healing efforts. They were surprised when the boy wasn't healed. Faith is not simply expecting something to happen. It's more than that.

Verse 24—"Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!'" What a great response, one that teaches us that we have three needs if we lack real faith.

1. *We need more than verbal faith.* Words are cheap. There's a difference between *saying* you believe in the Lord and really *believing in Him!*

Suppose I had a sick headache and went to the medicine cabinet and grabbed a bottle of medicine. Suppose I looked at the instructions and reasoned, "I'm sure they're correct. I have all confidence in the source of the medicine. I know who wrote these directions. I believe everything about it. I know this will relieve my

headache, if I just take it."

Is that real faith? You can't tell yet, can you? Suppose I take the medicine bottle and put it back on the shelf. What will happen? I won't get rid of my headache. Yet I can say I believe that medicine. I believe all about that medicine. But still I refuse to take it.

That's verbal faith. That's Sunday-faith. That's what the Bible calls dead-faith. So we need more than verbal faith.

2. *We need to face our doubts.* "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" What a transparent man! If you have doubts, don't try to hide them. Face them. Bring them to Jesus.

3. *We need Jesus to help us overcome our unbelief.* "Help me overcome my unbelief," the man said. That's what we must do as well, ask Jesus for help.

Know this. Faith is only as good as its object. Perhaps you're struggling to exercise real faith in Jesus. If so, the problem may be you don't know the real truth about Jesus. What happened next will help...

B. Jesus demonstrated why we can believe Him (25-27). "When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit [please note that crowds don't necessarily mean success; for Jesus, this crowd meant it was time to move on]. 'You deaf and mute spirit,' he said, 'I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.' The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, 'He's dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up."

Why can we believe in Jesus? Here are three reasons.

1. *He is powerful.* He simply commanded the evil spirit to leave and it left, no questions asked. The shriek and the violent convulsion indicate the spirit didn't leave gladly, but he left. The evil one doesn't give up ground without a fight. That's why if you want to have a life and a family that's going God's way, you are in for a battle. If you go with the flow, he won't resist you. But live God's way, and he'll scratch and claw to hold his ground. Can he thwart the Lord's agenda for you? No way. The Lord is powerful.

2. *He is compassionate.* The Lord "took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet." Do you see the Savior's great affection in that touch? After the demon left, the boy looked dead. But when he opened his eyes he saw the most loving eyes he'd ever seen. Do you remember that touch, when the Lord set you free from the clutches of the evil one?

3. *He finishes what He starts.* The healing occurred in two stages. First, Jesus rebuked the demon and the boy was set free. But he lay there lifeless. Then, Jesus lifted the boy to his feet. He gave him a life to live. There are no half way measures with Jesus. "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6)."

In developing real faith, first the Lord reminds us of our weakness. Then He reminds us of His sufficiency. Thirdly...

III. The Lord reminds us of our need for Him (28-32).

The final scene makes two truths perfectly clear for us.

A. *We aren't sufficient (28-29).* Verse 28—"After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, 'Why couldn't we drive it out?'"

They'd done it before. Perhaps that was part of the problem, their previous success in casting out demons. When Jesus first called the apostles He gave them authority to drive out demons (Mark 3:15). And they did, as Mark 6:13 reveals, "They [the disciples] drove out many demons." You say, "Why would previous success make them fail this time?" Perhaps the men started reading their own press releases. In other words, they forgot why it was they had been able to cast out demons. It wasn't due to technique, or innate strength. It was due to His power.

There's a lesson here. God gives us gifts. But we're in trouble when we stop depending on Him. The gift isn't enough without contact with the Giver.

God may have given you the ability to sing. Great, but if you fail to sing in dependence upon God you'll turn into a *professional*.

Why did they fail? Jesus said they failed because they hadn't done something. Verse 29—"He replied, 'This kind [apparently there are different kinds of demons, some more powerful than others] can come out only by prayer.'"

Only by prayer. It's significant that this is why Jesus went up on the mountain, *to pray* (Luke 9:28). But prayer is what the disciples failed to do.

Why didn't they pray? Think of what had just happened to these men. Only a week or so earlier Jesus had dropped the bombshell, announcing He was going to be killed and that they, too, had a cross to bear. What happened during the days that followed the text doesn't say. Then Jesus took the inner circle up on the mount for the transfiguration. It's possible the other nine disciples were "in a kind of stupor of bewilderment," to use the words of J. D. Jones. That announcement of the cross stunned them, took the wind out of their sails.

Perhaps it was a mixture of overconfidence and disillusionment. Whatever the reason, this was the result. The disciples failed to pray, and therefore the disciples *failed*.

Beloved, let this sink in. We are not sufficient.

1. If we really believe that, we'll pray. If you really believe God exists—God whom you cannot see—you'll talk to Him. To not talk to Him is to reveal what you really think about Him. A failure to pray reveals a faith that's failing or non-existent.

Matthew's account offers an important insight. We read in Matthew 17:19-20, "Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, 'Why couldn't we drive it out?' He replied, '*Because you have so little faith...*'"

You say, "Which was it, the lack of prayer or the lack of faith?" They go hand in hand. If we really believe that God is sufficient and we are not, we'll pray. What's more...

2. If we pray, we'll see Him do what He alone can do. J. D. Jones elaborates on the connection between faith and prayer. "You cannot omit prayer, and keep faith. For what is prayer? It is the meeting of spirit with spirit. It is man communing with God. It is the mortal laying hold upon the eternal. It is man talking with God; yes, and God talking with man. Now if anyone neglects prayer, if he does not speak to God, and hear God speak to him, God becomes vague, distant, unreal to him. He loses his sense of God, his assurance of the presence of God, the resistless force and power the assurance of God's presence always brings. And losing his hold of God, he becomes impotent and paralyzed."

Faith isn't static, beloved. Faith must be cultivated through the use of spiritual disciplines, including consistent time in prayer.

We aren't sufficient. That's truth #1. Here's the second.

B. We need a Savior (30-32). "They left that place and passed through Galilee [Jesus is now heading to Jerusalem, to the cross]. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples [it was the Lord's plan to turn the ministry over to these twelve men in time; based on what just happened it was obvious the men weren't ready yet; so Jesus began to devote the remainder of His time on earth almost exclusively to these men, to teach them]. He said to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise [here is Jesus' second overt prediction of His coming death; see 8:31 for the first].' But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it [Maybe they don't say anything because they remember how Jesus rebuked Peter when he objected. So they chose a different subject, namely, they started arguing about which of them was the greatest (see verses 33-34)!]."

The Lord was teaching His men something we desperately need to learn. First, we aren't sufficient. Second, we need a Savior, a Savior who can do two things.

1. *We need Him to teach us.* You say, "How can He teach us? He's not here?" That's why He taught the twelve. They passed on His teaching to us in the New Testament. But we need more than His teaching.

2. *We need Him to save us.* In verse 31 Jesus introduced a new piece of information regarding His suffering. He mentions His *betrayal*. The verb *paradidotai* is a futuristic present, suggesting that although the betrayal was still in the future, it was happening in the present. The word can be translated "to be delivered up" or "to be handed over." It could well refer to Jesus' being delivered up *by God*.

That's why He came, to go to the cross and thereby provide salvation for all who will repent and place their faith in Him. Faith. We are saved by faith, *real faith*.

Make It Personal: If you want to make sure you have a real faith...check two things.

1. *Make sure you have believed in Jesus.* Past tense. Have you called on Him and asked Him to save you?

2. *Make sure you are believing in Jesus.* Present tense. Are you believing in Him right now? Is there evidence that you are trusting and living for Him?

[Mark Sermons](#)