

Introduction

1. Have you ever had a mountain-top experience only to have the cold water of reality poured over you?
 - a. Perhaps you remember a wonderful spiritual retreat, a conference, a camp, a revival, or a special worship service when the Spirit of God moved you in a dramatic and special way?
 - b. I can remember many such occasions in my life.
 - c. Perhaps you also remember returning from that time away or worship service back into the real world which soon tried to dampen and diminish that mountaintop experience?
 - d. There are bills to pay, work to do, calls to make, and many demands on our time and energy.
2. Daniel Akin writes, “Mountaintop experiences are wonderful, and we need them from time to time for spiritual nourishment and the recharging of our spiritual batteries. However, God never intended for us to stay there. He wants us ‘down here’ preaching the gospel to and ministering among the hurting and suffering. He wants us living with and serving real people devastated by the ravages of the fall and of sin. As His agents of redemptive love, we go in His name and with the promise of His presence. To forget this is to open ourselves up to all sorts of difficulty, challenges, and even failure, as nine of His disciples discovered with pain and humiliation” (Daniel Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 186).
3. Jesus came down from the glory of His Transfiguration to face a raging argument and the needs of a hurting father and a demon-possessed boy.
4. **Read Mk 9:14-29.**

A. A Raging Argument (14-18)

1. Jesus, Peter, James, and John came down from the Mt. of Transfiguration and rejoined the other disciples.
2. The nine disciples who were left behind were “arguing” (Gk., *suzeto*) with the “teachers of the law” (14).
3. Their heated argument had attracted a “large crowd” which surrounded the disciples and teachers. (14)
4. When the crowd saw Jesus, the people were “overwhelmed with wonder” (Gk., *eksethambeo*) and ran to greet Jesus (15).
 - a. Jesus’ disciples were certainly glad to see Him. Akin notes, “Oh how we need Him when enemies are nipping at our heels, ready to devour us if they can!” (Akin, 186)
 - b. Jesus had a reputation, like a modern rock star, and He immediately became the center of attention in spite of the juicy, heated argument in progress.
 - c. Everyone wanted to see what Jesus would do and what He would say.
5. Jesus asked His disciples, “What are you arguing with them about?” (16)
6. Before the disciples could reply, “A man in the crowd answered, ‘Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech.’” (17)
 - a. The boy had a “spirit that has robbed him of speech” (Gk., *pneuma alalon*). (17)
 - b. Not only had the spirit made the boy mute but also had caused him to have fits—“throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid” (18).
 - c. This spirit, which had possessed the boy from “childhood,” “. . . has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him” (22).
 - d. The boy may have also been deaf as Jesus described the demon as a “*deaf* and mute spirit” (25).
7. Notice that the man brought his son specifically to see Jesus –“I brought **you** my son.”
 - a. Jesus was absent on the Mount of Transfiguration.
 - b. So, the man sought the next best help from Jesus’ disciples.
 - c. Seeing a rabbi’s disciples was considered the same as seeing the rabbi himself.
8. Remember that Jesus had given power and authority to His disciples for ministry.
 - a. In the past they had used this delegated authority to good effect, even casting out demons and healing the sick (cf., Mk 6:7,13).
 - b. However, they had not been able to cast out the demon from this man’s son.
 - c. Akin notes, “Spiritual victories in the past (cf. Mark 6:7-13) are no guarantee we will be victorious today, especially when we operate with faith in ourselves rather than in Christ. . . . When all human efforts have been exhausted, we can turn to Jesus” (Akin, 187).

- d. Most likely the disciples' inability to cast out this demon is what led to their argument with the teachers of the law, who questioned their authority and power and by implication the power and authority of Jesus, their rabbi.
- e. Now that Jesus was on the scene, the man expected the boy to be healed and the crowd expected the argument over Jesus' power and authority to be settled.

B. Jesus' Response (19-27)

1. Jesus responded to the crowd, the teachers, the man, and his disciples with frustrated exasperation, "You unbelieving (Gk., *apistos* "no faith") generation. . . . How long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with (Gk., *phero* – "bear, carry") you?" (19a).
 - a. Jesus was exasperated with not only the teachers of the law but also His own disciples.
 - b. The teachers and His disciples had heard His teaching and seen His miracles, yet they lacked faith.
 - c. The disciples had received power from Him and healed in His name (cf., Mk 6:7,13), yet they lacked faith.
 - d. Peter and the disciples had identified Jesus as Messiah (cf., Mk 8:29), yet they lacked faith.
 - e. They had faith in the kind of Messiah they wanted—one who came in power—and not in the one Jesus was sent by His Father to be—a suffering, dying, and rising Messiah.
 - f. Warren Wiersbe muses, "No wonder the Lord was grieved with them! How often He must be grieved with us when we fail to use the spiritual resources He has graciously given to His people!" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 109)
2. Jesus then turned His full attention on the boy in need, "Bring the boy to me," Jesus said (19b).
3. As the boy came before Jesus the demon did its worst. (20-22)
 - a. They boy ". . . fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth." (20)
 - b. We have seen similar behavior induced by unclean spirits in past encounters with Jesus (cf., Mk 5:1ff – Gerasene demoniac).
 - c. The father cried out to Jesus saying, "But if you can do anything, take pity (Gk., *splagksno*) on us and help us" (22).
 - d. The father had lost confidence/faith in Jesus based on the failures of His disciples.
4. Jesus named the critical problem with both His disciples and the father—a lack of faith.
 - a. Jesus replied, "If you can? . . . Everything is possible for one who believes (Gk., *pisteuo*)" (23).
 - b. William Lane explains, "Jesus seized upon the father's words at the point where they were most tempered with doubt: 'if you can.' Verse 23 can be paraphrased, 'As regards your remark about my ability to help your son, I tell you everything depends upon your ability to believe, not on mine to act.' By this reversal of intent, Jesus indicates that the release of the man's son from possession is not to be a response to the conditional 'if you can,' as if his power were something to be elicited through challenge. What is to be tested in the arena of experience is not Jesus' ability, but the father's refusal to set limits to what can be accomplished through the power of God. In its struggle with temptation, faith must always free itself from the disastrous presumption of doubt" (William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 333).
 - c. The boy's father replied with a classic line, "I do believe (Gk., *pisteuo* – "have faith"); help me overcome by unbelief (Gk., *apistia* – "no faith")" (24).
5. Jesus took action by faith as He rebuked the impure/unclean spirit.
 - a. Jesus commanded the spirit, ". . . come out of him and never enter him again" (25).
 - b. The spirit "shrieked "(Gk., *krakso*) and caused the boy to convulse violently one last time, but then obeyed the command of Jesus and "came out" (Gk., *ekseltheo*). (26a)
6. Those who watched thought the boy was dead after the spirit left him. (26b)
 - a. Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet. (27)
 - 1) "lifted" (Gk., *hegeiro*) and "raised" (Gk., *aneste*) are words used in connection with Jesus later resurrection from the dead.
 - 2) Perhaps the boy did die and was raised back to life by Jesus.
 - c. James Brooks states, ". . . the exorcism constitutes a preview of Jesus' own death and resurrection and the resurrection of believers" (James Brooks, *Mark*, 148).

C. A Private Conversation (28-29)

1. As we have seen before, Jesus often had times of private discussion and teaching with His disciples after public encounters (cf., Mk 4:10ff, 7:17ff).
2. They went into a house and the disciples “. . . asked him privately, ‘Why couldn’t we drive it out?’” (28)
3. Jesus’ response focused on prayer—“This kind can come out only by prayer (Gk., *proseuche*).” Why did He mention prayer instead of faith? The two are intimately linked.
 - a. Akin observes, “Faith bridges the gap between divine omnipotence and human weakness, and that faith is experienced and exercised through prayer” (Akin, 190).
 - b. Lane adds, “The disciples had been tempted to believe that the gift they had received from Jesus (Ch. 6:7) was in their control and could be exercised at their disposal. This was a subtle form of unbelief, for it encouraged them to trust in themselves rather than God. . . . the power of God must be asked for on each occasion in radical reliance upon his ability alone” (Lane, 335-36).
4. Wiersbe concludes, “The main lesson of this miracle is the power of faith to overcome the enemy (Mark 9:19, 23-24; and see Matt. 17:20). Why had the nine disciples failed? Because they had been careless in their personal spiritual walk and had neglected prayer and fasting (Mark 9:29). The authority that Jesus had given them was effective only if exercised by faith, but faith must be cultivated through spiritual discipline and devotion. . . . Not only did their failure embarrass them, but it also robbed the Lord of glory and gave the enemy opportunity to criticize. It is our faith in Him that glorifies God (Rom. 4:20)” (Wiersbe, 109).

D. Reflections

1. When was a time that you felt a let down after a time on a spiritual high? How did you keep the faith and fire alive in spite of the cold water of life’s realities?
2. Are you using all the spiritual resources and other gifts and talents God has entrusted to you to do His work in this world?
3. Are you working in your own power or in the power of God? How effective is your own power?
4. Do you believe in Jesus—I mean do you *really* believe in Him? If so, what evidence is there of your faith in the Lord?
5. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt like the demon-possessed boy’s father—“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (24) How did God answer your prayer?
6. After you’ve tried everything else, have you taken it to the Lord in prayer? Why not start there next time?
7. Sometimes all we can do is come to Jesus and pray. What we need is beyond our abilities but as we have faith in God, He will supply all of our needs. He never lets us down.