

"FRAIL FAITH MEETS A STRONG SAVIOR."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden

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Text for the Sermon: Mark 9:14-29

Introduction.

Spiritual mountain tops often give us a refreshing and much needed vision or glimpse of something about God, but He doesn't let us live there for long.

Remember how I began my sermon last week saying that Phama and I were anticipating a mountain top experience this next week in Key West for our son Todd's wedding. Well sometimes our mountain tops don't live up to our expectations even before we get there. That's certainly true for Todd and Emma. They got bad news from an immigration lawyer on Tuesday and they have to postpone their wedding 30 to 40 days.

So we are about to embark on the most exotic and expensive Woodyard family vacation we have every taken. Our dreams and plans and expectations don't always go as we hope do they? Life is full of twists and turns and ups and downs. Even our best plans go awry.

Welcome back to reality, to life in the valley. Jesus said, "In this life you will have affliction and trouble." In this life we have defeats, setbacks, conflicts, trials, dreams crushed, hopes dashed, faith shattered. How are we to cope? How do we go from mountains to Mondays?

Moses came down from his mountain top experience on Mt. Sinai to walk right into the face of idolatry and rebellion. Elijah came down from his mountain top to confront the paganism of Ahab and Jezebel.

Mark 9:14-19, From Mountain tops to Mondays.

Jesus just had the most incredible experience of heavens glory, that glory He had laid aside 32 years before. He had conversed with Moses and Elijah, He had heard the reassuring voice of His Father in heaven declaring His great love for His Son. He had just engaged in deep conversation about rich truths of the faith, opening more of the OT to His closest friends.

And immediately He was confronted with a great crowd, contentious scribes, a demon possessed son, a distraught father, and a bunch of impotent, confused disciples baffled by Satan's power.

What a contrast. He moved from the presence of God Himself to the presence of Satan himself. From the work of God to the work of the devil; from a vision of glory to a nightmare of ugliness and wickedness.

Talk about your bad Monday morning. Welcome back to reality. Welcome to our world. The mountain top is the exception, this is the norm. Just when everything was so glorious, not just one thing, but a bunch of things engulf Jesus.

To sum up this whole scene Jesus cries out, "*O faithless generation*, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?"

Jesus wasn't just talk about the disciples or the scribes or the father but *the whole generation* and not just that generation but our generation. The love of God is shown to us in the text by its clear warning and its sharp rebuke concerning three powers, which if stated in the negative are, the power of Satan, the power of unbelief and the power of prayerlessness. And if stated in the positive, the power of Jesus over evil, the power of even the smallest faith and the power of prayer.

Mark 9:20, 25-27, The power of Satan and the power of Jesus over Satan.

First, we are reminded from this story of the power and presence of evil in our world. The world, the flesh and the devil seek to do us great harm.

These stories of demon possession in the Bible tend to go over our heads and get past our hearts with not much reflection. One of the lessons of these stories is the horror and power of sin and evil in our world. But we miss it.

To us greed is just ambition and being success driven. Gossip is just exciting news. Lust is just appreciating beauty. Pride is just being honest about one's accomplishments. Anger is justified because of what they did. We don't see the danger and destruction of evil and the damage it does to our souls.

We have to be reminded of how bad sin and evil are. They are never good, they never lead to life, they never point us toward what is right.

We should ponder how fiercely Satan hates all that belong to God and how viciously Satan would attack and destroy us if he could. We should express great gratitude to God for how God constantly restrains Satan for doing his very worst against us all. What we do experience is only a very small hint of Satan's evil intentions.

Consider the extreme that God permitted Satan to go with Job, and be grateful for His protecting grace in our lives. For all our sin and disobedience and faithlessness, consider how much more we should suffer but don't.

As parents we must be diligent in teaching and training our children from a very young age the difference between good and evil, right and wrong. He must teach them to love holiness and godliness. Satan seeks to do them harm, he baits many traps and sets before them many temptations. We must teach them the virtue and blessing of delayed gratification, self-discipline, self-denial, self-control, patience in trial, and how to resist the devils tricks.

It's never too soon to begin to speak to them of sin and their need for a Savior. How long do you think Satan waits to begin to influence our children? Parents and grandparents, be diligent and vigilant and by all means prayerful.

We learn also how the nearer Jesus comes the more fiercely Satan rages. The greater our desire to be faithful and obedient the greater the attack and resistance. The more we strive to have a godly home, the more Satan tries to disrupt things.

The presence of Jesus does not always produce immediate peace. Sometimes there is conflict before there is resolution. Sometimes greater suffering comes before resurrection. The situation gets worse before it gets better. God sometimes tests our faith to develop our perseverance.

But the greater the enemies attack, the greater God's glory is displayed in His giving of grace to withstand the blows. Our best hope of help from the Lord is when things seem to be at their worst. He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. Satan is powerless before Jesus.

Mark 9:21-24, The power of unbelief and the power of belief.

Mark 9:23-24 And Jesus said to him, “If you can’t! All things are possible for one who believes.” 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!”

Doesn't that sound contradictory? How can belief and unbelief dwell in the same heart? Let me ask a question, “Are there any partial unbelievers here this morning?” That describes all of us.

Don't we find ourselves in countless situations where we are in doubt, confusion, thinking God has abandoned us or failed us, where God has piled too much on, even more than we can bear?

Who of us has a perfect faith or perfect trust? Who of us has conquered all doubt and fear? The strongest Christian is a mix of belief and unbelief. We are all partly unbelievers who can rightly pray, “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.”

In fact we should be constantly praying that prayer and fighting against unbelief and weak faith. In fact this is the most basic battle in the Christian life.

Hebrews 3:12 Take care, brothers, lest there be *in* any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

The remains of unbelief lurk in all our hearts and express itself in all kinds of attitudes and actions like anxiety, impatience, anger, bitterness, lust, hate, greed, envy, pride.

Greed and covetousness are unbelief because we are not trusting in God's provision or we are not content with what He has given us.

Anxiety is unbelief because we fear the future and that God won't take care of us.

Lust is unbelief in God's best way of meeting our sexual needs and going around His plan.

Impatience is unbelief in God's timing.

Bitterness is unbelief in the power of forgiveness.

Every sin is a sign of unbelief. And unbelief is battled with the weapons of confession, prayer, the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit.

Notice something here. What's the greatest obstacle to be overcome in this story? Satan or unbelief? It's unbelief. That's what this story is about and that's why Mark gives so much detail about the scribes, the disciples and the father and his conversation with Jesus.

Unbelief is the harder and more serious obstacle. The problem is never divine inability but human unbelief. The smallest expression of faith is rewarded by the power of Christ. “Greater is He who is in us than him who is in the world” (I John 4:4). Drive this deep into your

conscience. Drink deeply from this well. “If God be for us who can be against us” (Romans 8:32). Remember and believe.

John 10:28-29 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Mark 9:28-29, The power of prayerlessness and the power of prayer.

What follows is a private conversation. The embarrassed disciples ask why they failed. They had cast out demons before, why were they unable to now?

The issue is in whom are they trusting? In whose power are they acting?

Mark 9:29 And he said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”

This kind only comes out by prayer. No prayer, no power.

What is prayer? When you pray what are you doing? You are making a statement of faith. You are acknowledging that you are powerless, without the resources to do something. You are acknowledging that God is powerful. You are acknowledging that you are surrendering, giving up, casting all your hope on God. You are giving the whole situation over to God and asking for His wisdom and His will, asking for His resources and His help.

Prayer is surrendering the unbelief of self and the unbelief of our ability and our wisdom to God, and completely depending on God. Prayer tells us what we believe. Prayer tells us who we trust and who we are depending on.

Prayer is acknowledging that the battle we are in is not a minor skirmish; it's a life and death battle with principalities and powers against whom we are no match. Prayer is a battle field walkie-talkie, calling for assistance and reinforcements and supplies.

We are up against real enemies with real power and they will only be defeated with God's power and by God's Word and Spirit.

We will never defeat the sin and evil in our own hearts by trying harder or by doing better or by screwing up our will power. If you had the ability to do it on your own, Jesus never would have had to come. Help only comes in total dependence on God through constant prayer.

Are we part of a faithless generation, a generation that's self-absorbed, a generation that's so affluent, so rich in things that we can see our needs, deny the danger of sin, and show our doubt through prayerlessness?

We live in a world deeply affected by evil and suffering. We can't and must not move into that world without prayer, without earnest intercession and appeals for divine assistance.

Application and Conclusion.

We baptized three little baby boys this morning. We did it because Jesus said,

Mark 10:14 “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

Matthew 18:5 “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, 6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

The demon tried to kill the boy with fire and water and when it did leave it left him in a state that appeared dead to those all around. Jesus threatens those who cause a little one to stumble with death by water and the fires of hell.

There is a profoundly serious and sober thing to be recognized here. To hate children and to seek to harm and destroy children is demonic. Abortion and child abuse is exactly what you would expect Satan to do. But to hate children and to seek to harm and destroy children is to invite the direct opposition of Jesus Christ.

We have a choice; we either serve the one who destroys children, or we serve the one who rescues and saves children and will one day destroy those who destroy children (see Doug Wilson, sermon on Mark 9:14-50). This demon will only come out by much prayer.

The message this morning is, parents, this world is a dark and dangerous place full of sin and evil. Bring your children to Jesus. Don't walk, run. Bring them to Jesus over and over again. Point them to the power of Christ. Pray for them and teach them to pray. No matter how weak your faith is, come to Jesus with your little faith and He will bless and honor it.

Hear the voice of God this morning, hear God's warning and God's rebuke. Open your eyes to see that sin is way more destructive and poisonous than we think. And our reliance on our own resources and sufficiency is way more worthless than we realize. Believe and pray. This is the Father's love for you and this is His grace held out to you.

Prayer:

Holy Father, thank you for our faith, we know that it is a gift from you by your Word and Spirit. But don't let us be content with little faith, we pray you will increase our faith. And don't let us neglect our faith, but preserve it, defend it, sustain it. Don't let us fail or fall short or be tempted by unbelief. Increase our faith that in everything we will honor you and glorify you. We pray to you as the giver of every good and perfect gift in the name of your perfect gift, your Son. Amen.