Powerful Faith
Mark 9:14-29
SS Lesson for 03/06/2016

Devotional Scripture: James 1:2-8

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Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson teaches about the role of Powerful Faith in our daily Christian lives. The study's aim is to understand the power of faith in God to change situations. The study's application is to pray with greater confidence and faith in the power of God in our daily struggles.

(Key Verse: Mark 9:23)

Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

This episode of desperate human need and the disciples’ failure contrasts sharply with the glory of the transfiguration. It shows the reality of living in the world in the absence of Jesus. The disciples from whom help could be expected (cf. Mark 6:7) were powerless. Mark 9:28-29 provides the key to understanding this incident. In Jesus’ absence they must live and work by faith in God, expressed through prayer. The extended account (in contrast with Matt. and Luke) and the vivid details once again suggest the input of Peter’s eyewitness report. When Jesus and the three disciples (cf. v. 2) returned to the other nine disciples, they saw a large crowd gathered around the nine and Law teachers arguing with them. The subject of the dispute is not stated. As soon as (euthys; cf. 1:10) the crowd saw Jesus they became greatly amazed (exethambēthēsan, “alarmed”; cf. 14:33; 16:5-6) and ran to greet Him. Their astonishment was not due to some afterglow from the transfiguration (cf. 9:9) but to the unexpected yet opportune presence of Jesus in their midst. Jesus asked the nine what the argument was about. A man in the crowd, the father of the demon-possessed boy, explained the situation to Jesus. Respectfully addressing Jesus as Teacher (cf. v. 5), the father said he had brought his son to Jesus for healing because the boy was possessed by a spirit (cf. 1:23-24) who deprived him of his power of speech (and hearing; cf. 9:25). Also the demon often convulsed him with violent seizures symptomatic of epilepsy. The demon’s attempts to destroy the lad (cf. vv. 18, 21-22, 26) show again the purpose of demon possession (cf. 5:1-5). The father’s appeal to the disciples to exorcise the demon was legitimate because Jesus had given them authority over evil spirits (cf. 6:7).

Jesus addressed the crowd but especially His disciples with deep emotion (cf. 3:5; 8:12). O unbelieving generation emphasizes the characteristic cause of all spiritual failure—lack of faith in God (cf. 9:23; 10:27). The rhetorical questions further reflect Jesus’ continued distress over His disciples’ spiritual dullness (cf. 4:40; 6:50-52; 8:17-21). Yet He intended to act with power where they had failed, so He commanded, Bring the boy to Me. When the demonic spirit saw Jesus, he immediately (euthys; cf. 1:10) threw the lad into a violent seizure, reducing him to utter helplessness (cf. 9:18). In reply to Jesus’ compassionate inquiry, the father said his son had experienced such pathetic and near-fatal convulsions from childhood. The lad’s condition was long-standing and critical. The words, If You can do anything, indicate that the disciples’ inability to expel the demon (v. 18) had shaken the father’s faith in Jesus’ ability. Jesus took up the father’s words of doubt, If You can, to show that the point was not His ability to heal the boy but the father’s ability to trust in God who can do what is humanly impossible (cf. 10:27). Jesus then challenged the father not to doubt: Everything is possible for him who believes (cf. 9:29). Faith sets no limits on God’s power and submits itself to His will (cf. 14:35-36; 1 John 5:14-15). The father’s response was immediate (euthys). He declared his faith (I do believe), but also acknowledged its weakness: Help me overcome my unbelief! This brings out an essential element of Christian faith—it is possible only with the help of the One who is its Object. When Jesus saw that a curious crowd was converging on the scene (apparently He had withdrawn briefly), He rebuked (“ordered”; cf. 1:25) the evil (lit., “unclean”; cf. 1:23, 34) spirit with two commands: come out... and never enter him again. With a final burst of violence on his victim and a scream of rage (cf. 1:26), the demon fled. The boy lay
limp in utter exhaustion looking like a corpse so that many concluded, He's dead. But Jesus... lifted him... up. Mark’s parallel wording in the account of the raising of Jairus’ daughter (cf. 5:39-42) suggests that breaking from Satan’s power is like passing from death to life. To accomplish this in a final, irreversible sense necessitated the death and resurrection of Jesus Himself.

Verses 9:28-29 conclude this incident and explain why the disciples failed. After going indoors (lit., “into the house”; cf. 7:17; the location is unnamed) the disciples asked Jesus privately (kat’idian; cf. 4:34) why they could not expel the demon. Jesus explained, This kind—probably demonic spirits in general rather than a special type of demon—can come out only (lit., “is not able to come out by anything except...”) by prayer. The disciples had failed because they had not prayerfully depended on God’s power. Apparently they had trusted in past successes (cf. 6:7, 13) and had failed. Nearly all major ancient Greek manuscripts have “prayer and fasting” at the end of 9:29 (NIV marg.). Perhaps the words were added early by some scribes to the textual tradition to support asceticism. But the words, if original, refer to a practical means of focusing one’s attention more fully on God for a specific purpose, for a limited period of time.

**Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

Some believers say that miracles were only for biblical times, while others insist that they are still happening. Still others fall in between, and there are those who are not sure what to believe. There are just some things that seem to be beyond the scope of the possible. That is what the father in this lesson was facing. His situation seemed impossible, beyond hope. He was almost ready to give up. Try to place yourself in his shoes. His only child was suffering, caught in a demon’s grip for years. He was forced to watch as his child was destroyed more each day, and he was absolutely helpless to find a remedy. From the passage, we know that this father loved his son. I would say that he had exhausted his resources to find a cure. He had sought out rabbi after rabbi and tried remedy after remedy. Still, his son grew worse. When he approached Jesus, he was desperate. He did not know where else to turn, and he had heard stories about the healings this Prophet had performed. Initially, he asked the disciples for help, but they were unsuccessful (Mark 9:18). By then, discouragement and despair were foremost. That was when Christ stepped in. He had just come down from the mountain after the transfiguration. He found His disciples being mocked because of their failure. Curiously, Christ did not heal this child immediately. Instead, He asked the father how long his son had been that way. The father did not hesitate to say. However, he did show doubt in Christ: “if thou canst do anything” (Mark 9:22). Christ told him that anything was possible if he would just believe. I think this was a challenge. He was checking just what this man was willing to risk when it came to faith. The man's response is one we all have cried: “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief (Mark 9:24). If we think, all of us can remember a circumstance that seemed hopeless. It was not that we did not believe but rather that the situation seemed impossible. We find ourselves setting limits on our Saviour. Belief and unbelief often reside within the same person, since faith is not always perfect. Watch what happened. After this man’s exclamation, Jesus did not expound on some message concerning the necessity of faith in daily life. Instead, He cast out the demon, and the boy was healed. All of us know from reading Scripture that the boy would be healed. That seems obvious to us. To this father, it was not. Like Abraham, he was being asked to place his only child completely in God's hands (Gen. 22:1-19). In both instances, that faith was rewarded. It requires unwavering trust in God and His work even when we cannot see Him working (Heb. 11:1). It reaches beyond what we see and clings to God's. Faith that is powerful has conviction and confidence in God's authority over all. Someone with powerful faith believes that he has been given that faith through Christ. If we believe this, then we have faith to go out and do even the most formidable task for His glory. Let us cultivate and practice such a powerful faith.
Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

What was the best water you ever drank? That may seem like an odd question. After all, most of the water we drink daily varies little in taste. But most of us can name a time when we truly savored a drink of water. We were thirsty, maybe hot. Perhaps we were working hard in the heat or playing a vigorous sport. Perhaps we were traveling where water was not readily available. We were desperate. When we finally received the water we needed, it tasted wonderful! Our experience of relief was intense because our need was intense. The Bible says something similar about faith in God. There is never a time when we do not need God. But we can easily spend most of our time unconscious of that need, living as if we needed no one but ourselves. But into every life come situations that strip us of our sense of self-sufficiency. These are times when we realize that we have nothing or no one else on which to rely except God. So we cry out for his help. In those moments, we discover what real faith is. Today’s text presents a man who had just such an experience. His son was in desperate need, and the father knew that he was powerless to help. What this man said in his anxious weakness will show us much about our own situation.

Our text brings together several themes that interweave and build throughout the Gospel of Mark. One of these themes is Jesus’ authority over impure spirits. The first recorded miracle of Jesus in this Gospel is the casting out of such a spirit from a tormented man (Mark 1:23-27); Jesus went on to exercise this power on other occasions (3:11; 5:1-20; 7:24-30). Another interwoven theme is the failure of Jesus’ disciples. Their failure to rely on his strength in difficult circumstances led him to challenge their lack of faith and hardness of heart (Mark 4:35-41; 6:45-52; 8:14-21). When Jesus questioned the disciples regarding their conclusion of his identity, Peter replied, “You are the Messiah” (8:29). But the next recorded interaction between the two shows Peter attempting to “correct” Jesus’ prediction of his own death and resurrection. This earned Peter a sharp rebuke from Jesus: “Get behind me, Satan!” (8:33). Later, two disciples presumed to request places of authority (Mark 10:35-45), having already been taught that “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all” (9:35). Another disciple went on to betray him, one to deny him, and all to abandon him (14:17-21, 43-51, 66-72). A third interwoven theme is the faith of the needy and outcast. Although the 12 disciples failed to trust in Jesus as they should have, those who were at the end of their rope in one way or another expressed a deep faith born of their deep need. Marginalized “tax collectors and sinners” wanted to be close to Jesus (Mark 2:13-17). A woman whose medical condition made her an “unclean” social outcast believed she could be healed merely by touching Jesus’ garment (5:24-34). A Syro-Phoenician (non-Israelite) woman replied to Jesus’ hard saying with persistent faith (7:24-30). These individuals had a deep realization of their need to rely on Jesus—a realization that the 12 disciples often didn’t seem to have. Today’s text comes at an intersection of these themes. Following hard on Jesus’ transfiguration (Mark 9:2-13), the mountaintop experience of encounter with divine glory became a valley encounter with the demonic. (Parallel accounts are in Matthew 17:14-21 and Luke 9:37-43a.)

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Wavering Faith (Mark 9:14-19)

14 When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them.
15 Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and began running up to greet Him.
16 And He asked them, "What are you discussing with them?"
17 And one of the crowd answered Him, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute;
18 and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it."
19 And He answered them and said, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!"

Wavering because of confusion (14-15)

Confusion caused by someone who influences toward disobedience (Gal 5:7-10)

7 You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? 8 That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. 9 "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." 10 I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be.

Confusion caused by a different gospel (Gal 1:6-7)

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

God is of peace, not confusion (1 Cor 14:33)

33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints,

Confusion caused by envy and selfish ambitions (James 3:14-16)

14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

Wavering because of disappointment (16-18)

The Limits of Human Resources (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

Lloyd’s of London was long a “rock solid” company. It started in 1688 as a coffeehouse where merchants and ship owners came to insure their cargoes and ships. Eventually Lloyd’s became an insurer of many enterprises, from the risky to the mundane. Movie star Betty Grable even bought a Lloyd’s insurance policy on her legs—legs that were as much a source of her celebrity status as was her acting ability! But in 1987, Lloyd’s began to lose money because of catastrophic losses on policies held by companies who suffered major disasters. In just two years’ time, a petroleum drilling platform in the North Sea exploded; terrorists blew up Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland; the Exxon Valdez spilled its load of oil off the coast of Alaska; a refinery exploded in Texas; and the 1989 San Francisco earthquake struck—the one the world saw live during a World Series telecast. Lloyd’s covered them all, and by the early 1990s it was questionable whether the fabled insurance company could survive. The disciples seemed at one time to have everything they needed for a rock-solid ministry. After Jesus gave them power over demonic spirits earlier, it seemed the ministry of the disciples would be unstoppable. But like the disasters just mentioned, the demon in our text presented itself as an unrelenting disaster—wreaking havoc on its victim and pointing to the inadequacy of the disciples’ resources for all to see. Whatever the source of evil, human power is often unable to solve our problems. God himself doesn’t always make our problems go away, but ultimately only he can help us deal with them.

Disappointment because of depression (Ps 42:5-6)

5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and 6 my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon— from Mount Mizar.
Disappointment because of believing that God has forsaken us (Isa 49:14-15)

14 But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me." 15 "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!

Disappointment because of afflictions and bitterness (Lam 3:19-23)

19 I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. 20 I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. 21 Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: 22 Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. 23 They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Disappointment that can be combated by a living hope in God (1 Peter 1:3-7)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Wavering because of an unbelief (19)

Anger Management  (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

At first glance, we might think that Jesus is irritated with the father of the boy. Upon reflection, though, Jesus’ primary frustration seems to be with his own disciples. They have reason to understand more about faith by now than they are giving evidence of using. How long is he going to have to put up with their slowness? How many illustrations is he going to have to give? How many miracles will they have to see? When will they understand and show evidence of that understanding? He could ask me the same things—and probably you, too! Jesus teaches good lessons about anger. His anger is not out of control. It is controlled; it is directed. It has a purpose. He does not get angry about things that are done to him—such as rude slights or insults. He gets angry when his anger can make a difference. Here it makes a point about faith, whole-hearted faith; about trust, which depends on God for what is beyond ourselves. No, men, you can’t handle this on your own. Why will you even try? Jesus had given them authority over unclean spirits (Mark 6:7), and already they had cast out demons (Mark 6:13). But when this tough one came along they did not believe enough, and they did not depend enough—on God’s power.

Unbelief in the promises of God  (Rom 4:18-21)

18 Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. 20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

Unbelief because of ignorance  (1 Tim 1:12-14)

13 Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. 14 The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Unbelief that can be avoided by standing firm in the faith  (1 Cor 16:13)

13 Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.

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Unbelief because of weaknesses and persecutions (2 Cor 12:10)

10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Unbelief that can be combated by being strong in the Lord (Eph 6:10)

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Willing Faith (Mark 9:20-24)

20 They brought the boy to Him. When he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth.
21 And he asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood.
22 "It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!"
23 And Jesus said to him, "If You can?" All things are possible to him who believes."
24 Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief."

Willing to try Jesus (20-21)

Try Jesus to see that He is good (Ps 34:8)

8 Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

Try Jesus like a newborn baby (1 Peter 2:2-3)

2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Try Jesus as a gift from God that provides eternal life (John 4:10-15)

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." 11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" 13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

Try Jesus as the bread of life (John 6:35)

35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

Try Jesus as if thirsty and find out that He has inexhaustible water (John 7:37-39)

37 On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."
Willing because of desperate need (22)

A desperate need that only Jesus can fulfill (John 6:66-69)

66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. 67 "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

A desperate need for help from Heaven (Ps 73:25-26)

25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

A desperate need that requires prayer night and day (1 Tim 5:5)

5 The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help.

A desperate need that only at the Throne of Grace can be helped (Heb 4:16)

16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Willing because of wanting to believe (23-24)

Not an issue of power, but of faith (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

The plea if you can do anything shows discouragement. The disciples have already tried and failed. But it is not an insult for the father to ask Jesus to help if he can. The father is aware that Jesus has done great things, but maybe this is too much. Anything that Jesus can do will be greatly appreciated. Jesus immediately responds to the father’s “if” with an if of his own. The father’s “if” in verse 22 has raised the issue of Jesus’ power or ability. But Jesus turns the tables and says, in effect, that this isn’t an issue of his own power, but of the father’s faith. I can do it, if you can believe, Jesus answers. What Jesus is talking about, of course, is not just some general kind of belief, some hoping against hope, some power of positive thinking. Rather, it is an absolute trust in him. That’s the only kind of faith that can yield results.

Wanting to believe because of weak faith (Matt 17:20)

20 He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, "Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Wanting to believe that prayers will be answered (Matt 21:22)

22 If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

Wanting to believe for a healing (Acts 14:9-10)

9 He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed 10 and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

Wanting to believe because of wanting to please God (Heb 11:6)

6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Delivering Faith (Mark 9:14-19)
25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again."
26 After crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, "He is dead!"
27 But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up.
28 When He came into the house, His disciples began questioning Him privately, "Why could we not drive it out?"
29 And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer."

**Deliverance from uncleanness (25-27)**

**Uncleanliness that the blood of Jesus completely sanctifies (Heb 9:13-14)**

13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

**Uncleanliness that is cleansed by hearts being sprinkled through faith (Heb 10:22)**

22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

**Uncleanliness that is cleansed by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11)**

11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

**Uncleanliness that is cleansed by a willingness to trust God (Matt 8:2-3)**

A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." 3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"

Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.

**Uncleanliness that is not just on the outside, but on the inside (Matt 23:25-26)**

25 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

**Deliverance from doubt (28)**

**Deliverance from doubt by those who are merciful (Jude 20-23)**

20 But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. 21 Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. 22 Be merciful to those who doubt; 23 snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear-hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

**Deliverance from doubt by an increase in faith (Luke 17:5-6)**

5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" 6 He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.

**Deliverance from doubt by God's grace (2 Cor 12:9)**

9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.
Deliverance from doubt by relying on God's strength (Phil 4:13)
13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Deliverance from doubt by focusing on Jesus (Heb 12:2-3)
2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Deliverance through prayer (29)

Prayer and fasting (from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator)
According to Matthew 17:20, their powerlessness over the demon was due in part to their lack of faith. Beyond that, Jesus informed them that this particular kind of demon could be cast out only through prayer and fasting. Perhaps they assumed that all they needed to do was speak to this demon in the name of Christ and it would retreat. As we have already seen, the evil spirit vehemently resisted even the command of the Master before departing the child. This whole incident raises the issue of the efficacy of prayer coupled with fasting. While most Christians strongly believe in prayer, we are unlikely to be as persistent as we need to be on certain occasions. In the parables of the friend at midnight (Luke 11:5-8) and the importunate widow (18:1-8), Christ stressed the importance of persistence in prayer. Praying about something only once or twice reveals that we are not very serious about a particular request. While most modern Christians are more in tune with feasting than fasting, this discipline can have many benefits. Some of those benefits may be physical, but most are spiritual (Isa 58:1-7). By definition, fasting is doing without food for a specified period of time while devoting oneself to spiritual pursuits. To fast does not necessarily mean that one has to do without food for many days at a time. One can fast from a single meal for the purpose of devotion to prayer, study, and meditation. Fasting was practiced on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29), when grieving (I Sam. 31:13), in times of national crisis (Esther 4:16), to express repentance (Jonah 3:5; Acts 9:9), and when church leaders were ordained (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23). There are, of course, warnings about ostentatious fasting (Matt. 6:16-18; Luke 18:12). In the context of this passage, though, prayer and fasting were the spiritual disciplines necessary to enable the apostles to confront and gain victory over evil forces.

Deliverance through prayer offered in faith (James 5:15-16)
15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Deliverance through prayer to the One who is worthy of praise (2 Sam 22:4)
4 I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.

Deliverance through prayer when we are in trouble (James 5:13)
13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.

Deliverance through prayer because of obedience to God (1 John 3:21-23)
21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God 22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. 23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.
Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Alan Carr

Intro: Thomas Aquinas - Roman Catholic scholar who lived between 1225 and 1274. He was a brilliant thinker who left an indelible imprint on the fabric of his time.

His visit to the Vatican.

The Pope is said to have looked at Thomas Aquinas and said, “Behold, Master Thomas, the church can no longer say, as St. Peter, ‘Silver and gold have I none!’”

Aquinas was quick to reply, “Alas, neither can we say what follows, ‘but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.’” Thomas Aquinas understood a truth that many people never grasp.

The real measure of success for a church or a ministry is not how fine its buildings are; how large its offerings are; or how great its crowds are. The real measure of success for a church or a ministry is in whether or not it operates in the power of God. We are living in the day of ministerial success. Every church wants to be the largest, the richest, the most influential, etc. Success is measured these days in millions of dollars; tens of thousands of attendees and in worldwide fame and attention.

The sad truth is this: God has a very different standard for determining what constitutes a successful ministry.

In this passage, the Lord Jesus teaches us about the most important ingredient of a successful ministry. The disciples lacked that ingredient and they failed miserably. We are told in verse 18 of this text that the disciples of Jesus failed in their attempt to cast out a demon from a little boy. The boy’s father summed up their efforts by saying “…and they could not.” He was right! He came to these men hoping to find some help for his family, but he found that these men had no help to offer. They could not! Why did they fail? They failed because they lacked spiritual power. They lacked spiritual power because they were missing the one ingredient that assures spiritual power. I would like for us to look into these verses today because we need the message they teach us. We are here trying to carry out the Lord’s business in these dark, sinful days and too many times people walk away from our churches saying, “…and they could not.” Our problem is the same as that of the Lord’s disciples. Often, we lack the necessary ingredient required for spiritual success.

By God’s help, I want to unpack these verses today. I want to preach on the phrase this father used to sum up the ability of the disciples, when he said, “…And They Could Not”. I want to point out The Lack Of Spiritual Power: The Lord of Spiritual Power and The Lessons Of Spiritual Power. Let’s listen carefully to what the Lord has to say to us today, both as individuals and as a church. I pray that we will hear the truth and heed the truth so that it will never be said of Calvary Baptist Church, “And They Could Not!”

I. v. 14-19    THE LACK OF SPIRITUAL POWER

Let’s set the stage for these verses. In verses 1-13 of this chapter, Jesus had taken Peter, James and John up into Mount Hermon and He was transfigured before them. The glory of His heavenly state became visible on the mountain top. These three disciples say Jesus in His glory. They saw Moses and Elijah and listened to them talk to Jesus about His impending death on the cross. They even heard the voice of God the Father as He praise Jesus Christ His Son! These men had seen The Midnight Son and they must have been floating with excitement as they came down from that mountain. But, when they arrived back in the valley below, they came face to face with a world struggling under demonic force. That’s why I told you last Sunday to enjoy those mountain tops for all they are worth. There is a valley just ahead and you will need the blessings and glories of the mountain top experience to sustain you through the valleys. When Jesus and the three disciples come down from the mountain, they find the other nine disciples engaged in an argument with some scribes, v. 14. It seems that a distraught father had brought his demon possessed
son to Jesus for healing. Jesus was gone up on the mountain when he arrived, so he asked the disciple to heal his son. They could not cast out the demon and the scribes are mocking them for their lack of power. Jesus walks upon this scene and asks for an explanation, v. 16. The father, in agonizing detail, describes the pitiful condition of his son. Every verb the father uses in verse 18 is in the present tense. The father’s language describes a horrible, ongoing situation of demonic torment. It is a sad state of affairs and when Jesus hears the details, He voices His Own dismay over the all that He has heard. The word “O” in verse 19 is a word of deep anguish. It was usually reserved for a time of burdened prayer. People would come before God and cry out of their hearts and lift their “O’s” to the Lord. Have you ever been there? Have you ever had a time when your heart was breaking and as your soul vented its pain it cried “O” unto the Lord? Jesus is expressing His displeasure toward everyone assembled there that day. He is hurt that no one seems to be able to believe. The disciples, who have seen His power first hand, don’t have faith. The religious leaders don’t have faith. The gathered crowds lack faith. Even this broken hearted father does not have the faith necessary to see his son delivered from this demon. Jesus sees this lack of faith and He cries out, “How much longer am I going to have to put up with you?” It was a heartbreaking moment from Jesus, following as it did immediately after the transfiguration and His Father’s affirmation. Jesus was ready to get back to His Father’s house! The saddest aspect of this whole scene is not the condition of the boy; the spirit of the scribes, or the anguish of the father. The saddest part of this whole account is the powerlessness of the disciples. These men had seen Jesus perform countless amazing miracles, yet they still lacked genuine faith. These men had even cast out demons in the past, Mark 6:7; 12-13. These men had seen the miracles and they had performed the miracles themselves, but now it is said of them “and they could not.” In many ways these nine disciples are a picture of the modern church. Like them, we have the reputation that we have power. This father came to Jesus, but he thought the disciples could help his son, v. 18. But, they lacked the power to make a difference. As a result, they have lost face with the father, the crowds and with the scribes, who are mocking them for their lack of power and ability.

The modern church has everything it needs to exist. Most churches have nice facilities in which to meet. Most churches have skilled people preaching and organizing the work of the church. Most churches have all the money they need to do the things they want to do. Many churches have all the people they want to fill up their pews and to do the jobs that need to be done around the church. But, most churches lack what they need most: The power of God. This building here, beside this highway, is making a promise to the world. This building tells every person who passes by that this is the place God meets with His people. This church house promises a needy world that they can find help when they come here. This church says, “If you need God, we can help you get to Him. If your life is broken, we can show you how God can fix it. If your family is coming apart, we can show you how God can put it back together again. If you are lost, we can show you how to be saved.” This church makes a promise to the world that we are different than they are; that we are able to help them; and that we care about them.

Our sign says it all!

Ø Calvary – That word means “the place of a skull”. We represent the place Jesus died to save sinners. We represent the cross and the blood of Jesus. We represent the power of God to save souls, secure eternities and change lives. We represent the Christ Who died on the cross to set His people free from sin’s bondage and to give them new life!

Ø Baptist – That name doesn’t mean what it used to! In my mind it still stands for something! We are Baptists! That means we are committed to preaching, teaching, sharing and living out the truth. We are Baptists! That means that we are different from every other denomination in the world. We are Baptists! Baptist means that we are committed to the sovereignty of God; biblical separation from sin and worldliness; and personal holiness. That word is our promise to the world that we are unique; we are different and we are real.

Ø Church – The word “church” comes from a Greek word that means “a called out assembly”. That word tells the world that we have been called out from among them to be different. It tells the world that we gather here to assemble ourselves before God to worship and honor Him. We are a church! We
are not a social club. We are a church! We are not an entertainment organization. We are a church! We are not like them, but we are like Him. We are a church! His power should be on us. His truth should be within us. His way should be before us. His Word should guide us.

Most churches in our day lack genuine spiritual power. There is no touch of God. There is not power of God. The world comes in and there is no help in the church for their condition. What does the world do? It stands around us and it mocks our weakness. May it never be said of this church “…and they could not.”

II. v. 19b-27 THE LORD OF SPIRITUAL POWER

Jesus hears the father’s story and commands the boy be brought to Him. When he arrives, the demon in the child recognizes Jesus and attacks the boy again. The child is gripped by convulsions, and he wallows on the ground, foaming at the mouth, v. 20. It is a pitiful scene. As the child writhes on the ground, Jesus begins to question this father. Jesus is attempting to overcome this father’s lack of faith. Jesus asks him about how long the child has been this way, v. 21. The father’s answer is graphic and telling. He tells Jesus that things have been this way since the boy was little. He also tells Jesus that the demon has attacked the boy repeatedly, trying to burn him to death or drown him in the water, v. 22. Then, the father bears the true condition of his faith. He looks at Jesus and he says, “but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.” It is a pitiful plea, but it is also a plea from a faithless man. This father trusted that the disciples of Jesus could heal his son. When they failed, his faith in Jesus and His abilities was shattered as well. In verse 17, this father had brought the son believing Jesus could deliver him. Now, this father’s faith has been reduced to “if thou canst to any thing…” When Jesus hears this man’s words, He responds immediately! The force of the Lord’s words in verse 23 does not really come through in our English Bibles. I don’t know if you know it or not, but the punctuation was not there in the originals. Here is what Jesus was saying, “What do you mean, if thou canst? Believe! All things are possible to him that believeth!” Jesus rebukes the father for his doubt and commands him to place his faith in Jesus for the healing his son desperately needs. When the father hears this, he makes one of the most honest and transparent prayers in the entire Bible. He looks at Jesus and says, “Lord I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” He is saying, “Lord, I do believe in You and in Your power. But, my faith is weak! Help me to grow in my faith.” Then Jesus commands the spirit to leave the boy and to never return, v. 25. The demon attacks the child one more time and comes out. The child becomes so quiet and so still that the onlookers assume that he is dead, v. 26. Then, Jesus does what He does best; He takes the child by the hand and He lifts him up. The child rises and he is free, v. 27.

There are some spiritual lessons we need to glean here before we move to our final thought today. Let me share them with you.

Ø A powerless church portrays Jesus Christ in a bad light – Because the disciples lacked power, the father assumed Jesus lacked power too. The same is true around the house of God. When a lost world walks into a church building and it sees deadness, coldness and apathy; the lost assume that Jesus is just as lifeless, just as powerless and just as dead. Most churches are guilty of false advertising! They claim to have something to offer the world, but they have nothing but cold, dead religion and that helps no one! It’s time the church told the truth about Jesus! He changes lives! Knowing Him is exciting! His church is alive and active in the world. His Gospel has power. We should never be guilty of false advertising! We need to live up to what’s written on our sign!

Ø Weak faith is better than no faith at all – This father was filled with doubt, but there was still a kernel of faith in his heart. As a result, he got what he desired from the Lord. God is not put off by our doubts, but total unbelief slams the door on His power in our lives. We need to remember that it isn’t large faith that receives big answers from the Lord. It is simply genuine faith that sees Him move in great power. Matthew 17:20, “And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.”
Jesus is still in the “lifting up business” – Just as Jesus took this poor, dead boy by the hand and lifted him up into a new life, Jesus can do the same for all who come to Him by faith. He can lift that dead sinner out of his sins and into a new life in Christ, 2 Cor. 5:17. He can lift that cold, apathetic church member out of his complacency and into a new life of joy and blessing, Rev. 3:20. He can lift that burdened believer out of his fears and give him peace that passes all understanding, Phil. 4:6-7.

III. v. 28-29 THE LESSONS OF SPIRITUAL POWER

When this episode is over and the disciples are alone with Jesus, the nine who failed to deliver the child ask Jesus about why they failed, v. 28. These men were concerned about their spiritual failure, and they should have been! The answer Jesus gave them is both simple and telling. His answer is that these men failed because they lacked spiritual discipline in their lives, v. 29. Prayer is a state of close communion with the Lord. Fasting speaks of a lifestyle of total submission and surrender to the Lord. These men were not communing with God as they should have been. Neither were they as surrendered to God as they should have been. As a result, they lacked the power of God on their lives and they could not cast out this devil. The disciples did not fail because they did not believe! They believed all right, or they would not have tried to cast out the demon from this child. They believed they could cast out that demon and when they failed, they were humiliated, amazed and dismayed. Their problem was they believed in the wrong things. They failed because their faith was in their words and the rituals they used and not in God. Their faith was in the ritual. Their faith was in what they had done before. Their faith was in themselves. These men failed because they were not leaning on the Lord Jesus Christ for the power they needed. We fail in the Lord’s work and we lack His power for the very same reasons. We lack the power of God in the modern church because we lack spiritual discipline! We are no longer a praying people. We are no longer a surrendered people. We are no longer a people who walk in total dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ. We have become like the Jews in Acts 19:13-17 who were trying to cast out a demon in Jesus’ name. They had the formula and they had the ritual, but they lacked the power of God to get the job done. That is the state of the modern church! We look back to the glory days and we rest on what the church did then. We think we can have the power of God because we pray a five minute prayer. We think the fire of Heaven will fall just because we are saved and doing a few religious things in our lives. The truth is, there will be no power; there will be no glory; there will be no revival in the church until God’s people learn to lean on Jesus and on Him alone for what we need. What do we need?

Ø We need to pray – I am referring to prayer that seeks the face and the will of God. I am referring to prayer assaults the throne room of God, refusing to be silenced until the answer comes. I am talking about the church returning to the days of lying on the altars, seeking God and His power.

Ø We are commanded to pray, 1 Thes. 5:17; Luke 18:1. He has promised to hear our prayers, Jer. 33:3; Isa. 65:24. He has promised to answer our prayers, Matt. 7:7-11; Mark 11:24; John 14:13-14; 15:7. Genuine, faith-filled praying is the key that will open the door of revival and power for this modern age!

Ø We must be surrendered – God cannot bless and use a church that is not separated from the world, 2 Cor. 6:17-7:1. It is God’s will that we place everything we have, are and ever hope to have or be on the altar for His glory, Rom. 12:1-2.

Ø We need to become totally dependent on the Lord for everything – Until we reach the place where we understand that the power of God does not come because of our preaching, our singing, our working or our manipulation of people and things. The power of God rests on us as we learn to rest in Jesus, John 15:5. The cure for what ails the modern church is found in our Lord’s words to the church in Ephesus; we need to fall in love with Jesus once again, Rev. 2:1-7.

We do not need new programs. We do not need more powerful personalities. We do not need new buildings, new trinkets and toys. We do not need to become more “seeker friendly”. We do not need to change our music or our message. What we need is simple. What we need is available. What we need is
the power of God. That power will come when God’s people get serious about seeking His face; walking in His ways and leaning on Him for all we need. It will come then and only then, 2 Chron. 7:14.

**Conclusion:** “And they could not!” What a tragic statement! When people come to Calvary Baptist Church and worship with us, what is their thought when they leave?

Can they say, “The power of God is in that place; they serve a mighty, wonderful Lord”? Or do they leave here saying, “I went there for help; I went there for fellowship; I went there for love; I went there for hope; I went there for peace; I went there for acceptance; I went there for Jesus, and they could not”?

Has God spoken to you about what you need to do to make Calvary Baptist Church the church He wants it to be? Has He spoken to you about your faith? He spoken to you about your prayer life? He spoken to you about your level of surrender? He spoken to you about how much you depend on Him? If He has spoken, you need to hear His voice and do what He is telling you to do. He spoken to you about your salvation? If so, you need to come and be saved. I have delivered the burden of these verses. I have delivered the burden of my heart. It is time for you to do what He is calling you to do. We can either be a people who can or a people who could not. Which kind of people we are rests on us.

(Adapted from URL: http://www.sermonnotebook.org/mark/Mark%2043%20-%20Mark%209_14-29.htm)

**Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

"If God gave her a forty-thousand-dollar jet, He must want me to have one too." This was said by a pastor in Uganda, a land with twelve million AIDS orphans and much need, after a visit from a famous female “evangelist” to his country. Her message of health and wealth received a great response, but she left behind people like this pastor, who used her message as an avenue for personal greed. When God did not heal or grant their requests, many others would become disillusioned about Christianity or feel like spiritual failures. Verses like Mark 9:23 give us hope. Faith can move mountains. Faith is the victory. However, some who call themselves Christians will use such verses to spread their claim that God wants everyone to be happy, healthy, and rich in this life and that anyone who is not must not have enough faith. Those in ministry around the world will encounter people who either have been disillusioned by such claims (when they had faith but the healing did not happen) or who want to believe it because they want comfortable lives. Ironically, though today’s main verse could be used as ammunition by those who preach health and wealth, when read in context, the full passage is an argument against the idea that your level of faith determines the result of your request. In the passage, the disciples were unable to heal the boy due to their own lack, not that of the person needing healing. Also, Jesus healed at the request of the father, not the boy. The level of faith (if any) of the actual sick person was never mentioned. And the healing was not based on the father having a great level of faith, either. He himself said, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24). Anyone in outreach today needs to know how to respond to the health and wealth message. Following are some biblical refutations. The reason for faith should not be to get what we want. James 4:3 says we do not receive what we ask for when we "ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." Our prayers should be for the will of God more than our personal desires. The Bible clearly states that we will have suffering in this life (cf. Ps. 34:19; John 16:33; 2 Cor. 4:8-11). In heaven, all will be wonderful. Here it is not. Getting what we want is not always representative of our level of faith. The first half of Hebrews 11 is about people doing wondrous things because of faith, but the last half talks of ones who suffered horrible things—also because of faith. Our comfort does not always fulfill God’s purposes. When Lazarus sickened and died (John 11), Jesus did not say it was because of a lack of faith. He said it was for the glory of God. (See also the man born blind in John 9.) In the final analysis, asking for health and wealth is selfish, a way to sound spiritual while demanding that life be the way we want it. We in ministry need to help seekers and believers alike understand the Christian life as the Bible presents it so that they will not be swayed by false teachers who use Scripture for their own benefit. As Jesus said, what good is it if a person gains the whole world but loses his soul (Matt. 16:26)?
Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. Before we get into an argument, we should remember that we will answer to Jesus about it (Mark 9:14-16)
2. God does not want excuses; He wants our faith (vss. 17-19)
3. We must never doubt God's ability to act, no matter what the odds are (vss. 20-23)
4. We do not need rock-solid faith; we just need faith in Jesus (vs. 24)
5. The work of God in our lives can be frightening, but it leads to lasting peace (vss. 25-27)
6. Where human strength fails, prayer avails (vss. 28-29)