

Everything Is Possible For Him Who Believes

Mark 9:14-29

Key Verse: 9:23

“If you can”? said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.”

This passage makes a great contrast with the last one. In the last passage Jesus was on a mountain where he revealed the dazzling glory of God. Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus. God’s own voice came from a cloud affirming that Jesus is the Son of God whom God loves. However, in today’s passage, as Jesus descends to the foot of the mountain, he confronts defeated disciples, nasty religious leaders, a demon possessed boy and his suffering father, and a crowd of spectators. Jesus calls it an “unbelieving generation.” Jesus descended from the glory of God on the mountain into an unbelieving generation. What could anyone do in such an atmosphere? Jesus began to plant faith in the heart of one person: “Everything is possible for him who believes.” Jesus also planted in his disciples faith that prays. Jesus wants to plant faith in our hearts, and in our generation today. Let’s listen to Jesus: “Everything is possible for him who believes.”

I. Jesus laments over the unbelieving generation (14-19).

When Jesus and his three disciples came down the mountain to the other nine disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. How did this happen? We can imagine that the nine disciples were unhappy to be left behind by Jesus when he went up the mountain. One by one, they might have thought, “Why only Peter, James and John? Why not me?” Then they began to have competitive desires. Each one wanted to do something great to gain Jesus’ recognition. Then a golden chance came. A father brought his son to Jesus to be healed of demon possession. Each of the nine wanted to be the one to solve the problem. They jostled each other as they stepped forward to lead. They were confident of success. Among them, perhaps Philip emerged, took a pose, and said, “Demon, come out!” The boy looked at him pointlessly. Matthew began to laugh, and said, “Step aside, Phil; I will show you how it is done.” Matthew used two hands instead of one, and said in a baritone voice, “Demon, come out!” The boy did not respond at all. Bartholomew came forward, thinking, “These guys have despised me because I don’t say much. Now I will show them.” Bartholomew danced around and said, “Demon, come out!” This time the boy yawned. The disciples realized that they had failed miserably. They felt weak and empty. Fear and despair began to tug at their hearts. The world looked very dark. Suddenly, the teachers of the law confronted them, brandishing diplomas and glittering garments, saying: “You labor-class men cannot drive out demons. You have no education, no social grace and no sense.” This made the disciples angry. They retorted, “You teachers of the law are nothing but decorations. You powerless wimps.” The argument was turning into a boxing match. A crowd gathered and began to take sides. Some were chanting, “Go, disciples, rebuke the teachers of the law.” Others were chanting, “Go, teachers, rebuke those upstart disciples.”

Then Jesus appeared. As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him (15). Jesus likely carried the afterglow of transfiguration glory. Jesus looked holy, peaceful, loving, powerful, transcendent, and joyful. One glance at Jesus filled people with divine wonder. All thoughts of demons and arguments were gone; they were filled with joy and awe. They ran to Jesus, saying, “Wonderful Jesus. Our good shepherd Jesus. Teach us, heal us and restore us.” But Jesus did not turn his attention to the crowd. Jesus was concerned about his disciples, who looked depressed and defeated. Jesus asked, “What are you arguing with them about?” However, the disciples were too ashamed and dispirited to answer. For a few moments there was silence. Then the boy’s father spoke up, “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” (17-18).

This father had suffered much because of his son’s spiritual condition. The evil spirit robbed the boy of speech and closed his ears (25), cutting off his communication. The boy neither listened to, nor spoke to, his father. To any father, the joy of life is to raise his son in noble humanity and in the knowledge of God. Jewish fathers trained their sons with the word of God and with wisdom for life, in order to pass on a spiritual inheritance. Sons who listen to godly fathers blossom into blessed men. This father might have dreamed to raise his son as a great spiritual leader. But the evil spirit cut their relationship. The father could not train his son at all. He could not even bond with his son. Perhaps the demon had said to the boy, “Your father is a foolish old man. He is irrelevant and out of date. But you are cool and stylish. Ignore him and do what you want to do.” However, the boy did not become cool and stylish. He completely lost control and became self-destructive. As the father watched the boy writhing on the ground, he felt deep pain. He would do anything to help his son. Yet he had no power to fight evil spirits. He brought the boy to Jesus, but Jesus’ disciples failed miserably.

How did Jesus respond when he heard this story? Look at verse 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.’” Jesus lamented over the unbelief of the entire generation. Jesus expressed his great anguish of soul to live among unbelieving people. We can learn how to see the real problem.

First, it was a problem of the whole generation. To the people observing this event, it may have been tempting to take sides and to place blame. One could blame the disciples for their failure in exorcism. One could blame the father for his poor parenting skills. One could blame the boy for his corrupted inner desires. One could blame the teachers of the law for their selfishness, lack of compassion, poor Bible study, powerless messages, lack of prayer, and so on. However, Jesus lamented over the unbelief of the entire generation. Jesus wanted everyone to repent instead of blaming others. We encounter the bizarre and shocking behavior of troubled young people every day. It is easy to analyze the situation and blame others. But we must realize that their problems are our own problems. Jesus wants us to pray for them. As the saying goes: “If we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem.” We should not be part of the unbelieving generation.

Second, unbelief is a serious sin against God. Jesus was grieved by the unbelief of the generation. We must acknowledge that unbelief is a great sin against God. But many do not take unbelief seriously. When we catalog sin in our minds, what do we think of first? Murder? Adultery? Theft? What about unbelief! In John 16:9 Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would convict the world of guilt in regard to sin, because men did not believe in him. The root of man's spiritual problem is not believing in Jesus. In Revelation 21:8, the list of sinners who go to hell begins with the cowardly and unbelieving. Unbelief is the root of sin and the hotbed for evildoing. Unbelief is deliberate rejection of God. Romans 1:20b,21 says, "...men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him..." Unbelieving people are given over to sinful desires and even demon possession. In 1962, the Supreme Court ruled that prayer in public schools was illegal. This changed the atmosphere from one of belief in God to one of unbelief. Prior to this, behavioral problems among students were chewing gum in class or passing notes. Nowadays we have to worry about gang activity, sexual predators, and murder. When God is removed, the devil comes in. Unbelief is an invitation to demon possession.

These days unbelief is fashionable among certain intellectuals. Since the age of Reason began, the scientific theory challenged divine revelation as the basis for truth. Many intellectuals claim that they can believe only what can be proved scientifically. Since they cannot see God or measure God, they claim that God does not exist. But God gave each man innate knowledge of God. Men know God exists. Yet they deliberately suppress the truth to live according to their sinful desires. This is the sin of unbelief. It is all the more insidious in intellectuals, because they have a profound effect on society. Jesus laments over the sin of unbelief. Yet Jesus did not stop there. Jesus went on to plant faith in the unbelieving generation.

II. Jesus said, "Everything is possible for him who believes" (20-27).

Though Jesus was grieved, Jesus did not avoid the problem. Jesus took responsibility to solve it. President Harry Truman has become popular once again these days. His famous line was, "The buck stops here." He meant that he took ultimate responsibility for all problems in governing the USA. Likewise, Jesus takes responsibility for the souls of men. Jesus always takes responsibility to follow up on his disciples. They brought the boy to Jesus. When the spirit saw Jesus, it threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. He seemed to get worse. This was the manipulation of the evil spirit who wanted to stop him from coming to Jesus by any means, especially by planting fear in the boy's father. Bringing people to Jesus can be a fierce spiritual battle. It requires perseverance and the endurance of hardship.

The situation seemed desperate. But Jesus did not heal the boy first. Jesus spoke to the father first. It was to plant faith in the father's heart. To Jesus, planting faith in the father was more urgent than healing the boy. Jesus asked, "How long has he been like this?" The father must have felt assured by Jesus' calm presence. He opened his heart to Jesus. He said, "From childhood. It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything,

take pity on us and help us.” The father’s plea was heartbreaking, yet he revealed an inner problem that Jesus wanted to solve.

Look at verse 23. “‘If you can’?” said Jesus. ‘Everything is possible for him who believes.’” Jesus took issue with the father’s words, “If you can?” It indicated that the father was not sure that Jesus could help him. We can understand. When we suffer with a chronic problem, it can seem so difficult that we begin to feel that even God cannot solve it. The problem becomes bigger in our hearts than God is. Jesus takes issue with such thinking. Jesus says to us, “Everything is possible for him who believes.” Think about that statement. “Everything is possible for him who believes.” Jesus tells us that there is no limit to what God can do. Jesus did not say, “Something is possible for him who believes,” or “many things are possible.” Jesus said, “Everything is possible.” On what basis does Jesus say this? It is not mere positive thinking. It is rooted in the very character and nature of God. God is our loving Father who gave his one and only Son Jesus to save us from our sins. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” God is Almighty God who raised Jesus from the dead. Acts 2:24 says, “But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.” God is unchanging and everlasting. God is perfect, holy and good in all that he does. God loves us personally and will exercise his power on our behalf when we believe in him. When we fix our eyes on the God of the Bible as he truly is, the question is never, “If you can?” The question is always, “Do I believe?”

Jesus words’ illuminated the father’s mind. He realized that Jesus wanted him to have faith in God. He responded immediately, “I do believe,” confessing his faith. He believed what Jesus said, “Everything is possible for him who believes.” We can have faith in a time of crisis when we listen to Jesus’ words. Romans 10:17 says, “...faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” Sometimes our hearts feel dry, even dead. Sometimes we feel just plain stuck. But when we read the Bible, the word of God speaks to our hearts. The word of God inspires us to have faith in Jesus. Even so, the father knew that unbelief remained in his heart. He could not get rid of it and he could not hide it. He brought it to Jesus, repenting, saying, “Help me overcome my unbelief.”

From this point, Jesus turns his attention to solving the boy’s problem. It shows us that Jesus accepts our sincere and honest confession of faith and blesses it. Look at verse 25. “When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. ‘You deaf and mute spirit,’ he said, ‘I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.’” Jesus rebuked and commanded the evil spirit. Jesus has authority over evil spirits. When Jesus speaks, evil spirits tremble and obey. Look at verses 26-27. “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.” Here we see the two sides of Jesus. Jesus rebukes evil spirits with absolute authority. But Jesus treats people with compassion, love and deep understanding. The boy was completely healed. It was a miracle of Jesus’ power.

We all have problems that we cannot solve. But the problem is not really the problem. How we respond is what matters. When we listen to Jesus' words, "Everything is possible for him who believes," we can put the problem in perspective. God can solve our problem, no matter what it is. We must confess our faith: "I do believe," claiming the promises of Jesus. We must also repent of our unbelief and ask Jesus' help: "Help me overcome my unbelief." Jesus is gracious and mighty. Jesus will intervene to help us and give us victory by his power. Jesus promised us, "Everything is possible for him who believes." Let's believe in Jesus.

We must also pray for our nation, America. On one hand, America is a believing nation. There are many God-fearing people who devote themselves to pray to God. Just last week, one man of God, Dr. D. James Kennedy, finished his race and went to heaven. Many marked his passing with gratitude to God. On the other hand, there is serious unbelief in America. Many academic centers, entertainment centers, and institutions are under the influence of the devil and spew out unbelief that infects our society and opens the way to demon activity. We must see our nation as Jesus sees it. We must lament over unbelief and do our best to plant faith in the hearts of people one at a time. Planting faith in one person may not seem like a great work. But this is what Jesus did. Let's plant faith in the people of our times through one-to-one Bible study.

III. Jesus plants prayer in his disciples (28-29).

After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" The disciples had felt very sorry about their failure to drive out the demon. But when they saw Jesus drive it out, their faith was renewed and they recovered their spirits. New admiration for Jesus began to grow in their hearts. They wanted to learn from Jesus. So they asked him why they could not drive it out. Disciples learn from their mistakes.

Look at verse 29. "He replied, 'This kind can come out only by prayer.'" Jesus did not rebuke his disciples. He kindly explained that some demons are more powerful than others. Most of all, Jesus taught them the importance of prayer. A good example of prayer was the father they had just seen. He did not seem overly impressive. He was not a spiritual giant with perfect faith. He was a fallen man, a mixture of good and evil; he had both faith and unbelief. But when he prayed to Jesus, he prayed from his heart. He listened to Jesus. He honestly confessed his sin of unbelief and asked Jesus' help. Through this kind of humble dependence on Jesus he could experience the miracle of God.

May God bless us all to hear Jesus' words, "Everything is possible for him who believes," and pray. God can heal the young people of our land and bless our nation. Amen.