

Mark 9:14-32 ~ Scripture Verses

The Healing of a Boy With an Evil Spirit

¹⁴ When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵ As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

¹⁶ “What are you arguing with them about?” he asked.

¹⁷ A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ 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.”

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.”

²⁰ So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

²¹ Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?”

“From childhood,” he answered. ²² “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.”

²³ “‘If you can?’” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.”

²⁴ Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil [a] spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.”

²⁶ The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.” ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

²⁸ After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?”

²⁹ He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer.[b]”

The Second Passion prediction

³⁰ They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, ³¹ because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.” ³² But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

Footnotes:

[a] Mark 9:25 – Greek: unclean

[b] Mark 9:29 – Some manuscripts: prayer and fasting

Mark 9:14-32 ~ Discussion Questions

1. While the three disciples were up on Mt. Hermon with Jesus, what problem were the other nine having? How did they deal with it?
2. Why might the people have been overwhelmed with wonder when they saw Jesus? (Generally, it is *after* a miracle when the people express wonder.)
3. What do you suppose the disciples and Pharisees were arguing about? (9:14)
4. As the boy's father, how would you feel during this argument? How do you relate to this today?
5. Why were the disciples unable to cast out the demon? How did Jesus feel at this point? (9:19)
6. What was the boy's life like up until this time? (9:22)
7. Jesus' response, "If you can?" in Verse 9:23 is almost contemptuous. In the second part of that verse "...him who believes" who is Jesus speaking of? (A) himself, (B) his disciples, (C) the boy's father, (D) whoever is listening?
8. The response of the boy's father in 9:24 seems to be a contradiction. How can you have faith and not have faith? Have you ever felt like this? How are prayer and faith related?
9. In what area of your life do you struggle with doubt? How has God helped you overcome your unbelief in the past? Or hasn't he?
10. When do you learn more: during spiritual highs or lows? Give an example. (James 1:2-8)
11. This story is about faith: lack of faith of the disciples and the faith of the boy's father that needed strengthening. What exactly is faith and what are the consequences with God of having or not having faith? (Hebrews 11:1, 6)
12. What news did Jesus repeat privately to the disciples? (9:31) What's are the differences between this time and the previous time he told them? (8:31-32) What is significant about the differences?

Mark 9:14-32 ~ Leader's Guide

1. While the three disciples were up on Mt. Hermon with Jesus, what problem were the other nine having? How did they deal with it?

They were unable to cast out a demon from a boy. They had apparently turned away from it and had gotten into a discussion with the teachers of the law.

This is a long story in Mark (much longer than the same story in Matthew) and may represent the coming together of two stories: the double description of the boy's illness (v. 17-18 and 22) and the apparent assembling of the crowd in v. 25, even though the crowd is already assembled in v. 14. In any event, the first half of the story focuses on the failure of the disciples and the second half on the faith of the boy's father. Fundamental to both parts of the story is the importance of faith—faith not shown by the disciples and the stuttering faith of the father.

2. Why might the people have been overwhelmed with wonder when they saw Jesus? (Generally, it is *after* a miracle when the people express wonder.)

The response of the crowd perhaps implies that some vestige of Jesus' transfigured form still remains.

3. What do you suppose the disciples and Pharisees were arguing about? (9:14)

The scripture doesn't say but at this point it could be any number of things. The presence of the teachers of the law so far north in the Holy Land would indicate their concern in monitoring the activities of Jesus. So although they might have been talking about the disciples' failure to cast out the demon from the boy but they might have been arguing about other teachings of Jesus.

4. As the boy's father, how would you feel during this argument? How do you relate to this today?

Assuming the disciples and Pharisees were arguing about not being able to cast out the demon, the father must have felt a bit foolish. Here he had brought his boy to Jesus' disciples who were able to do healing and this time they couldn't. Maybe the Pharisees were right and this Jesus was an imposter. He would certainly have had doubts. Frustrations too.

Are there times today when you've felt like you've done the right thing with respect to God and the church and nothing has gotten any better? Do you feel frustrated? Have doubts?

5. Why were the disciples unable to cast out the demon? How did Jesus feel at this point? (9:19)

When Jesus said “This kind...” in verse 9:29 that seems to suggest there are different kinds of demons. The disciples had apparently taken for granted the power given to them or had come to believe that it was inherent in them. Lack of prayer indicated they had forgotten that their power over demons came from Jesus and God.

Jesus was obviously frustrated and disappointed with the disciples and his remark in 9:19 was aimed at them, not the crowd.

6. What was the boy’s life like up until this time? (9:22)

Pretty bad. The father described it in two places (v. 17-18 and 22). It largely seems to be self-destructive behavior.

Although the primary focus of the story is on faith (lack in the disciples, faith of the father), we can also see self-destructive behavior in many of us today. It may not be a demon on the type described in this story, but the demon could be drugs or alcohol or some compulsive and destructive behavior. Think hoarders, thrill seekers, sports nuts, overeaters, etc.

7. Jesus’ response, “If you can?” in Verse 9:23 is almost contemptuous. In the second part of that verse “...him who believes” who is Jesus speaking of? (A) himself, (B) his disciples, (C) the boy’s father, (D) whoever is listening?

Jesus’ rhetorical question, “If you can?” essentially says, “of course I can” but the father had good reason to question Jesus after his disciples were unable to get rid of the demon. The second part of the verse about “him who believes” could be saying that he can help him because he, Jesus, believes. More likely, he is saying it is the faith of the person doing the healing but also the faith of the person being healed or the faith of those who brought (or pray) for someone who needs healing. It is not faith of any one alone: the healer, the one being healed, the ones praying for healing, but it is the total human context of faith in which healing or a potential miracle might take place.

8. The response of the boy’s father in 9:24 seems to be a contradiction. How can you have faith and not have faith? Have you ever felt like this? How are prayer and faith related?

Since human faith is never perfect, belief and unbelief are often mixed. The man’s famous reply shows that faith is both a human response and a gift from outside. Human response is essential but in the end, divine grace is needed too. Like overcoming temptation, you can’t increase your faith on your own; you need the help of God, which help you get through prayer.

9. In what area of your life do you struggle with doubt? How has God helped you overcome your unbelief in the past? Or hasn't he?

10. When do you learn more: during spiritual highs or lows? Give an example.

Common wisdom has it that we learn more from adversity than from smooth sailing and there are many examples to support that.

James 1:2-8 – ² Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

On the other hand, it would be a mistake to think that we only learn from the bad times. A positive, upbeat sermon, praise for a job well done, or the joy that comes from handling something you didn't know you could do are very positive teaching experiences. Perhaps the main thing is to be receptive and look for the lessons in both high and low experiences.

11. This story is about faith: lack of faith of the disciples and the faith of the boy's father that needed strengthening. What exactly is faith and what are the consequences with God of having or not having faith? (Hebrews 11:1, 6)

Hebrews 11:1 – Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Hebrews 11:6 – 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.

We do things by faith every day, i.e., walk down stairs, sit in a chair, take a shower, talk on the phone, etc., and we do these things without question (Will the stairs vanish? Will tomato juice come out of the shower? Will the phone work?) because the object of our faith is reliable and trustworthy, whether we can see it or not. And if the object of our faith is God himself, then our faith rests on his faithfulness and dependability, not on ourselves or our circumstances. That is why it is so important to know who God really is.

Sometimes we evaluate God through what we know or perceive about our circumstances rather than evaluate our circumstances based on what we know to be true about God. That's when our faith slips. And when our faith slips, what

happens? We can no longer please God (Heb 11:6).

12. What news did Jesus repeat privately to the disciples? (9:31) What's are the differences between this time and the previous time he told them? (8:31-32) What is significant about the differences?

The key message, repeated three times in Mark, is that Jesus will suffer and die at the hands of men, be vindicated, and rise again. This account is the shortest and does not mention the Jewish leaders. It may be sinking in because although it says the disciples "did not understand what he meant," at least Peter did not try to rebuke Jesus.

Additional (General) Discussion Questions

1. Why does a loving benevolent God permit so much evil in this world?
2. Is the Bible absolutely correct in everything? (That is, (A) does the Bible have *no* errors, or (B) is it an infallible guide in matters of spiritual truth, faith and practice, but may have errors in science, geology, and history?)
3. Was the flood a real event?
4. Was there really a tower of Babel? (And did the world have a single language?)
5. How could Moses (who wrote most of the first five books of the Bible) have known about the things that took place thousands of years earlier? And about people that lived and things that took place before the flood?
6. Does some natural selection exist (Darwin-type of evolution)?
7. What happens (or happened) to good people who lived before the time of Jesus and thus could not believe in him for their salvation? What about all the good people living today who haven't heard about Jesus?
8. Is hell real or just a hypothetical threat or concept?
9. How could a loving God take the life of David's child because of the sins of David? (2 Samuel 12:15-23)
10. Did Jesus promise (on behalf of God) to give us literally anything we ask for in faith? (Mark 11:23-24, John 15:7)
11. Jesus told us to always love our enemies (Matthew 5:44) but John said we should not receive some people (2 John 10). Isn't this a conflict in teaching?
12. Should money be taken from unbelievers to do God's work? (3 John 7)
13. Will Jesus come again as a lion or a lamb?