

Mark 9:14-50 (PM)

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 00] So, that was quite a long Bible reading, the first and the second one together. I'm not going to tackle the whole thing. I just want to zoom in on the first story, the story about the boy possessed.

It's a tricky little story, actually, because it sounds like a kind of a 101 on how to cast out demons, right? You can read it like a bit of a tutorial, and the lessons are, some are more powerful, so you need to pray extra special prayers or something like that.

Folks, it is not about that. I think the message of this story is actually quite simple. I think the message is this. The message is, we need Jesus.

We need Jesus. We really need Jesus. And we need to trust Him with the really big issues of our life. That's the way to do life, folks.

I think that's the basic message of it. Let me begin by just putting that little story in a bit of context. You remember from last week, Jesus and His three disciples went up to the mountaintop where Jesus was transfigured, and it was amazing.

[1 : 15] It was sort of like the curtain between heaven and earth was parted for just a few minutes. It's like the veil was just pulled aside, and we got to see the divinity of Christ.

And you can imagine the disciples coming down from that mountaintop experience, and they are just buzzing. They'd seen Jesus shine like the sun.

They'd heard the audible voice of God. And when they get to the bottom of the mountain, it's just chaos and pain and evil. And that's the context.

To help us get into the story, I thought what would be really helpful would be actually rather than just working slowly through the story, is to talk about the characters one by one.

Just slowly go through the characters in this short story. This is 9, 14 to 30. So let's do that. And let's start with the disciples, the ones who did not go up the mountain.

[2 : 25] Mark tells us that Jesus has just come down from the transfiguration, and he finds his guys, who didn't go up the mountain with him, arguing with the scribes.

So these are the disciples who tried to cast the demon out of the little boy, and they can't, which was a great surprise to them, because Jesus had given them the authority to do such things back in chapter 6, and they'd already been doing it, but they couldn't in this case, and they're baffled.

So when they get Jesus alone at the end of the story, it's the first thing they ask, not about the transfiguration. The first thing they ask is, why couldn't we do this? So that's the disciples.

Next, the scribes. The scribes, they are a group of religious folks, probably sent by the Sanhedrin to spy on Jesus. So the Sanhedrin were like this Jewish group of judges, elder types, who overstore religious stuff in their communities.

And they hated Jesus. They hated Jesus. And they were looking for ways to put a stop to him. So they had this crew called the scribes, who would sort of track where Jesus was going and watch him do his thing.

[3 : 39] And they were trying to gather evidence against him to bring a case against Jesus to stop him. So after the exorcism failure that they witnessed, I mean, the scribes would have just, they would have loved that, right?

They would have loved that. Look at these fools, they were thinking. So they are probably heckling and berating the disciples. It's kind of like the political party that you, when the political party you don't like is caught up in a scandal, that's just awesome, right?

That's awesome. We love it. That's how the scribes would have felt about this exorcism failure. So that's the scribes. Okay, there's also a crowd there, just standing around, watching this all go down.

And often in these stories, they're just watchers. They just want to see cool stuff. So they just wander around watching cool stuff happen.

Jesus is exciting, and there's not much more to say about them. Then, of course, we have the boy. He's possessed by evil. He's slowly being destroyed. He grinds his teeth.

[4 : 51] He's mute. He foams at the mouth. He convulses. He has seizures. He jumps into fire and water to hurt himself. The same story in Luke's gospel tells us he was the only child in this family.

And the boy has been like this since he was really little. It's the boy. So we have the father. My children are here, so I can say this.

Difficult kids are exhausting, right? Exhausting. But this situation, I cannot, I can't even imagine. And the dad can't even communicate with his child because he's mute. So it's just his experience with his only child is just pain.

As I was studying this this week, I was thinking, this poor, poor man. So I've seen my daughter, Bea, have a seizure. I mean, it's awful. It is absolutely awful.

[5 : 52] It's awful. But for this guy, it's happening continuously. It's just infinitely worse. And he can't leave the boy alone. Because when the boy is alone, he turns his back and this kid is throwing himself into water to drown himself.

Or throwing himself into fire to burn himself. You notice when the father asks for help, what does he say? He says, help us. He says, help us. Because his family life is so extraordinarily difficult.

So he comes to the disciples for help. Because he's heard about them and they fail. So when Jesus turns up, he grabs a hold of Jesus and he admits to Jesus, look, I don't know if you're up for the task, but would you help us?

I don't know if he can do it, but would you help us? And then he prays, help me believe that you can make a difference. So that's the boy, the father.

Of course, there's another character here. There's the presence of evil. This demonic power that's residing in the boy. And the goal of this evil in verse 22, the goal of this evil is to destroy the boy, it says there.

[7 : 07] Now, this particular battle in this story, the spiritual battle is obvious and it's acute. We have spiritual battles, of course.

I think they're just a bit less obvious and less acute. I think more in the West, the battles are more behind the scenes. We are being ruined by materialism and greed, those kind of things.

That's the kind of thing that's ruining us. It's tripping us up. It's eating us. It's trying to destroy us. It seems when Jesus walked the earth, these evil powers seemed a bit more keen on being public and confronting Jesus publicly.

So we have the disciples, the scribes, the crowd, the boy, the father, the evil. And finally and most importantly, we have Jesus. And Jesus comes down from the mountain, from the transfiguration, and he enters into our mess to confront evil.

It's wonderful, isn't it? It's a replay of the incarnation. Jesus leaving his heavenly home, entering our chaotic world to overcome the thing that is destroying us. And he does that because he loves us.

[8 : 26] And that's the Jesus we serve. It's brilliant, isn't it? Let's now think about the things that Jesus says, though, in this story specifically.

Because he says some things. He says some things. And they're wonderful things, but they're a bit hard to get your hair around. So let's look at these lines that he says.

Here's a great one. Oh, faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? It's great, isn't it?

It feels very harsh, though, doesn't it? Here's what's going on, I think. The disciples had failed to cast out the demon from this boy.

The father explains this to Jesus and his response, Oh, faithless generation. That's his summary of their failure.

[9 : 26] They were faithless. And there's plenty of emotion in that, isn't there? It's like Jesus' patience has been strained. And to dig deeper here into what's going on, let's have a look at another thing he says to the father.

The father says, help us if you can, Jesus. Help us if you can. I.e., help us, Jesus, if you have the ability to do so.

And Jesus says, if you can. Like, if I can. All things are possible for one who believes.

What do you mean? What do you mean, if I can? And you see, the common thread in those two things is a lack of faith, a lack of trust. So what Jesus is doing is he's trying to bring people to a place of trust and belief by exposing unbelief.

I'll say that again. He's trying to bring people to a place of belief and trust by exposing unbelief. So Jesus calls out these disciples' failure to cast out this demon.

[10:34] And he says, that is faithlessness. It's as a result of unbelief. Now, what's confusing about this, obviously, is that before these disciples could do this whole casting out of demon thing.

But here they failed. So what happened? Well, the clue, I think, is in the last words of Jesus to them. He says, this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.

And again, the story is not about demonology. It's about discipleship. Jesus says, you couldn't do this exorcism because you didn't pray.

In other words, Jesus is saying to them, what your faithlessness looked like in this situation is you basically just, you didn't rely on me.

In this situation, you weren't dependent on me. The disciples were trying to exorcise a demon, but without praying.

[11:40] It was such arrogance. They'd cast out demons before, but here it sounds like they'd stopped trusting or relying on Jesus for this work. They'd stopped praying.

The power that they had been given previously and used, it was, you know, it's not, it's not like a tool or a possession that they can wield at will.

They had to continue to trust Jesus for these things. But it sounds like they were just sort of trusting in technique, perhaps, not God.

And I want you to think about this. This is going to be a short sermon, by the way. I want you to think about this. As it relates to the challenging areas of your life. If you are not praying about it, I want you to think about the really difficult things, the tricky things in your life.

If you are not praying about it, then you've decided you can handle it by yourself. Your prayerlessness says to God and to others, I've got this one.

[12:56] It's fine. I've got it. I've got it. And this happens, I think, sometimes as we, after we've been Christians for a while. You know, sometimes I think we just stop bringing stuff to Jesus.

Right? We just stop doing it. Like marriage, you can get into this habit of just going, oh, marriage, yep. Now I've got this. Got it. Got it.

Done. Sorted. You know, the single life. Yep. Got a strategy. Got a strategy. I'll work it out. My career. Yep. Got a five-year plan.

Got it. No, write it down. Write it down. My kids, if you've got children. Yep. Got it. Sorted. You know. No problem. No. Do you know what prayerlessness does?

It dethrones God in your heart. And in its place, it puts just technique and your own sort of willpower and strength and stuff.

[14:05] Now, it's good to have willpower. It's good to have strategies. It's good to have techniques. Those things aren't bad things. It's good to have. It's good to have. But underneath all that, there must be a fundamental trust in Jesus.

Folks, why wouldn't you trust in Jesus? I mean, think about him. Is there anything in Jesus? No. Is there anything in Jesus that's faulty? No.

So we should go to him always. We don't work out our difficulties on our own. We come to Christ. We're in Jesus. We are. We're in Jesus.

We're in Jesus. Now, to finish up. Perhaps you feel a little bit like the father in this passage.

Perhaps you're just a bit sort of... You don't know if Jesus is up for the task.

Or perhaps you don't think you'll get the result you like if you go to him. but folks Jesus is up to the task and he can be trusted with the most difficult stressful things in your life God is omnipotent the only restriction on the outcome if you come to him as prayer the only restriction on the outcome is God's sovereignty he can't force his hands on things but we can trust him and we can bring our doubts and our fears to him we can bring all our drama to him and uh just as a final note it's not you might think i just don't i just don't have like tons of faith i'm not even saying like have more faith folks you just need a faith that prays amen now on that note before the time comes let me just pray for us very quickly and then Sydney is going to come and pray for us after our next time heavenly father very simply lord i just want to pray that um we would not be people who go through life sort of lone wolves thinking we can just walk it off tough it out but we would bring our stuff to you father in Jesus name amen too i you uh you me you you