

Introduction

Jesus had been performing miracles for quite some time, yet most were still struggling with faith (including the disciples)

v. 19 provides the purpose for this passage

A. A lack of faith can prevent us from doing what God has called us to do (9:14-19)

1. When Jesus, Peter, James and John return from the transfiguration, they encounter a dispute between the other nine disciples and the Scribes (READ 14-16)
2. It's not clear what they were arguing about, but it had something to do with the disciples' inability to heal a demon possessed boy (17-18):
  - a. This particular demon possession was an extremely violent one:
    - 1) It would violently convulse the boy (17-18a): **"And one of the crowd answered Him, 'Teacher, I brought You my son possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out (lit. withers away).'"**
      - a) Some believe Mark is describing a form of epilepsy
      - b) However, the text clearly states it was demonic (multiple times)
    - 2) Later we learn further down in the passage that the demon often tries to kill the boy (22): **"It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him."**
  - b. When the man asked the disciples to heal his son, they were unable to do it (18b): **"I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it."**
    - 1) This is a bit puzzling because earlier Jesus had give the apostles the power to heal the sick and cast out demons, and they did just that (6:12-13): **"They went out and preached that men should repent. And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them."**
    - 2) They didn't seem to have any trouble casting out demons before, but this time they failed
3. Jesus's rebuke provides the answer to why the disciples couldn't cast out the demon—it was a lack of faith (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!'"**
  - a. Jesus directly attributed the failure to a lack of faith, or **"unbelief"**
    - 1) Matthew records some additional details indicating that Jesus's rebuke was aimed in part at the disciples for the **"littleness"** of their faith (Matthew 17:20)
    - 2) However, Jesus also blamed the problem on the general lack of faith infecting the current generation (**"unbelieving generation"**)
    - 3) We find out later that even the father himself was struggling with faith (more on this later)
    - 4) So, it wasn't just the disciples lack of faith that prevented them from casting out the demon, but the general lack of faith of all those involved

- 5) We've seen this before where unbelief by the masses prevented Jesus from healing the sick (see Mark 6:5-6)
- b. So what was at the heart of their lack of faith?
  - 1) The man obviously thought Jesus could heal his son because he came looking for Jesus; maybe he lost faith when he only found Jesus's disciples or became discouraged when they couldn't do what he asked
  - 2) The disciples had cast out demons before, but maybe this time they lost faith because of the power of this particular demon
- c. How about us? Where do we see a lack of faith interfering with something in our lives?
  - 1) Does it ever prevent you from doing something you know you should do?
  - 2) Does it ever cause you to worry or fear?
  - 3) Does it ever stand in the way of making decisions?
  - 4) Does it ever prevent you from sharing your faith?

B. Sometimes we need help with our faith (9:20-27)
--

1. When Jesus asks for the boy to be brought to Him, the demon violently convulses the boy (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."**
  - a. Three times in this passage we are told of the extremely violent nature of this possession:
    - 1) When the father first comes to Jesus (9:17)
    - 2) Here
    - 3) And, finally, when Jesus casts out the demon (9:26)
  - b. The text doesn't say how old the boy is, but this had been happening since **"childhood"** (21): **"And He asked his father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' And he said, 'From childhood.'"**
  - c. To make matters worse (if they could be), the demon **"often"** tried to kill the boy (22a): **"It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him."**
  - d. Can you imagine the torment this father must have felt as he watched his boy suffer?
2. It's no wonder the father seemed to doubt whether even Jesus Himself could help the boy (22b-23):
  - a. The man originally came looking for Jesus in the hopes that He would heal his son (17)
  - b. Matthew and Luke indicate that he fell to his knees and begged Jesus to heal his son (Matthew 17:14; Luke 9:38)
  - c. However, by the time he actually asks Jesus to heal his son he does so with a bit of doubt (22b): **"But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!"**
    - 1) Maybe he became discouraged when the disciples couldn't help his son
    - 2) Maybe he became discouraged when his son began to convulse in front of Jesus
  - d. Have you ever been at that place where your head wants to believe but your heart or your emotions are getting the best of you and leading you to doubt?—this man was there!

3. Jesus gently rebukes the man with a rhetorical question and a powerful statement regarding the nature of faith (23): **“And Jesus said to him, ‘If You can?’ All things are possible to him who believes.”**
  - a. To put it another way, “It’s not about whether I can heal your son—of course I can; it’s about whether you have the faith to believe I can heal him.”
  - b. Jesus had demonstrated over and over again that He could heal the sick and cast out demons—in fact, that’s why the man brought his son to Jesus in the first place!
  - c. But, sometimes doubt gets in the way—like seeing the disciples fail to heal his son—and that’s when our faith stumbles
  - d. So, Jesus reminds the man he needs to have faith because **“all things are possible”** when one has faith:
    - 1) A word of caution here
    - 2) Notice that Jesus says all things are **“possible”** when we believe
    - 3) He isn’t promising that simply believing in something will make it happen
    - 4) Rather, He is stating that when we approach God we must do so in faith and in doing so anything is possible, otherwise we cannot expect anything (READ James 1:2-7)
    - 5) This is exactly what we see expressed in Matthew 9 when Jesus healed the blind men (READ Matthew 9:28-30)
  
4. The father recognizes the dilemma that we often face (24): **“Immediately the boy’s father cried out and said, ‘I do believe; help my unbelief.’”**
  - a. Here we have the perfect picture of the battle between the mind that wants to believe and the heart or emotions that struggle to believe
  - b. Intellectually this father believes that Jesus can heal his son, but he’s still struggling with some doubt
  - c. So, he does the only thing he can—he begs Jesus to help him believe
  - d. Have you ever found yourself in a similar spot, maybe where you’ve had to say, “Lord, I know I can trust you right now, but I’m having a hard time doing it.”
  - e. It’s at times like this that we need to pray and ask God to help us believe
  - f. God will honor such a request just like Jesus did with this young man:
    - 1) Notice, Jesus doesn’t rebuke him further or tell him to just muster up the faith he needed
    - 2) Rather, He granted him his request and healed his son (25-27): **“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.” 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!” But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up.”**

C. Genuine faith reflects a reliance on the Divine (9:28-29)
--

1. Later that day the disciples question Jesus about why they were unable to cast out the demon (28): **“When He came into the house, His disciples began questioning Him privately, ‘Why could we not drive it out?’”**
  - a. It’s obvious that the disciples were puzzled
  - b. A short time before this they had gone out on Jesus’s command and healed and cast out demons with no trouble
  - c. Why could they not do it this time?

2. When we compare Mark's account with Matthew's account we get a pretty good picture of what happened:
  - a. In Mark's account Jesus indicates that this particular demon was a bit more stubborn than most and could not be cast out without prayer (29): **"And he said to them, 'This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer.'"**
    - 1) By referring to **"this kind"**, Jesus indicates that there are different kinds of demons, and apparently this particular one was a bit more stubborn than most:
      - a) In other instances, we've seen demons immediately cower before Jesus, even beg him not to torment them
      - b) Here, we see none of that; instead, this demon violently thrashes the boy around and practically leaves him dead when Jesus commands Him to leave the boy
    - 2) Because of this, Jesus said only prayer could cast this one out:
      - a) This suggests that the disciples hadn't prayed
      - b) In other words, they hadn't asked God for His help which means they were not relying on His power but on their own abilities
      - c) One gets the distinct impression that when the demon failed to come out of the boy at their command that they simply gave up
      - d) It apparently never dawned on them to seek God's help
  - b. According to Matthew, Jesus actually prefaced His comments about prayer by first telling the disciples that they reason they couldn't drive out the demon was because of the **"littleness"** of their faith (Matthew 17:20): **"And He said to them, 'Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.'"**
    - 1) Jesus declares that if they had faith the size of a mustard seed, nothing would be impossible for them
    - 2) However, their inability to cast out the demon demonstrated that their faith didn't even measure up to that of a mustard seed---ouch.
  - c. When we combine the details from Mark and Matthew what we learn is that the disciples reliance on their own ability was a demonstration of their lack of faith, because ultimately genuine faith reflects a reliance on the Divine
  - d. In other words, how do we know when we are demonstrating faith? When we are relying on the Lord rather than on our own abilities.