

Growing Deeper in Mark

MARK 9.14 - 41

VERSES 14-29: As we begin this section, keep in mind that Mark has just been talking about what we are to believe in Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah and the Father's testimony that Jesus is his Son. Here we see how important our belief is to Jesus.

VERSES 14-18: Peter, James, John and Jesus are just coming down the mountain after the transfiguration and they find chaos. An argument between the disciples and the teachers of the law. The people see Jesus and 'overwhelmed with wonder.' It reminds us of Moses having to veil his face after being in God's presence. Jesus asks what the argument is about and a man from the crowd seizes the opportunity to cut to the quick. It is the father of a demon-possessed boy whom the disciples have been unable to deliver; hence the argument.

VERSE 19: Jesus is exasperated. The reason? Unbelief! Who is unbelieving, the disciples, the teachers of the law, the father? The whole generation, Jesus states. How many societal ills, demonic strongholds, besetting sins do we live with today because we are an 'unbelieving generation?'

VERSES 20-24: This is the first healing of this story. We often miss it. The boy is brought to Jesus and the spirit throws him into a convulsion. Jesus questions the father, but if you notice, the question is actually Jesus' means of diagnosing the father's need rather than the son's. The only thing Jesus reacts to in the father's reply is the phrase 'if you can.' Jesus corrects the man by stating, 'Everything is possible for one who believes.' The father is healed of his spiritual blindness in the only way any of us can be, he confesses it and asks Jesus to help him. What do you think happened when that father saw his son delivered? Think Jesus helped his unbelief?

VERSES 25-29: It seems Jesus does a rush job on the exorcism before the crowds can get there, but the boy is delivered. Jesus heads indoors and the disciples inquire as to why they were unsuccessful. This is one of the few times that we get to see or hear something about the source of Jesus' power to do these miracles. To this point we know that Jesus has been filled with the Holy Spirit at baptism and he makes time with the Father a priority, but here we find that prayer is a key source of spiritual power. Is there a sin with which you struggle? How is your prayer time? Is there a root of bitterness towards someone that you can't get over? How's your prayer life? Is there a seed of unbelief or rebellion in your heart? How is your time with the Father? Spiritual power is available to each of us if we are willing to take our empty bucket to the well.

VERSES 30-32: Jesus gets some alone time with the disciples to teach them. The one thing that Mark tells us he teaches them? "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." The one thing that Mark tells us the disciples talk about? "I'm greater than you are. Na-na-na-na-na-na."

VERSES 33-37: Jesus wants to talk about their arguing. They, suddenly, don't. I wonder how often Jesus wants to talk to me about something and I treat him just the way the disciples did here? Jesus doesn't let them off the hook (and neither will he let us off either). Sitting down (this means he is in teaching mode, just the opposite of how we do it) he gathers all twelve together so they all hear it the same. If you want to be first the path to

getting there is to serve everyone. Just a little counter-intuitive, wouldn't you say? Jesus uses a child as his object lesson. Children had the lowest standing in their culture, and Jesus equates them with himself. To be first, we must serve the least in our society. For whom do you have the least regard? Jesus says to serve/welcome them is to serve/welcome him.

VERSE 38: When I see an abrupt change of topic by one of the disciples (John in the case) I can't help but wonder if they didn't like what Jesus was teaching them very well. Whether John was seeking to divert Jesus or not, I am sure that his teaching that the must humble themselves even to children didn't sit well. They had vision of cabinet seat dancing in their heads!

VERSES 38-41: There is competition for their business! The disciples took care of it, letting the man know that he didn't have franchise rights. Jesus, far from being impressed, sets them straight. One doing miracles in his name is part of the franchise. Though we are told in other places to not be taken in by counterfeit miracle workers, Jesus affirmation of this man's ministry should give us pause before being too quick to condemn others who serve Jesus but are not a part of our church/denomination/nationality.