

Scripture: Mark 9:14-29

A Frail Faith in the Strong Savior

Beloved in Christ, the contrast between these verses and verses 1-13 is striking. As JC Ryle says, we come down from the vision of glory on the Mount of Transfiguration to a conflict with demonic possession down below. We are not now in the company of Moses and Elijah, but in the company of unbelieving scribes. We hear the voice of God the Father, bearing witness to His Son, saying "Hear Him!" and now "return to a scene of pain, weakness and misery.

A boy is in agony, a father is in despair; Jesus disciples are perplexed by Satan's power. The contrast we feel is very great.

The Son of God willingly laid aside His glory to come into this sinful world. Our faith is not always what it should be. Our faith wavers. We stumble. We fall. Visions of glory, seasons on the mount, will always be an exception.

From Mark 9:14-29, I declare God's Word to you that no matter how frail your faith, you have the strong Savior, Jesus

1. To face the powerful influences of unbelief
2. Therefore, come to Jesus in faith
3. And rely on Jesus through prayer

1. To face the powerful influences of unbelief [vv.14-18]

Being on the mountain, Jesus was not with the other nine disciples. They thought His presence was no longer with them. The devil seems to be in control. The evil spirit that possesses a boy is not yielding to the disciples. The disciples are not able to cast out the evil spirit.

In Mark 6, Jesus was training His disciples, so that they could continue His work. But their strength was not their own. They would need to learn as Jesus says in John 15:5, "*without Me you can do nothing.*" He sent out His disciples to preach the gospel and gave them power over demons [6:7] and they gave report of all they did [6:13] But as soon as Jesus goes away, the disciples are unable to cast out the unclean spirit. It's almost as if they forgot about Jesus.

Verses 14-15: Jesus comes down from the mountain, what does He see? He finds His "little flock in confusion". Like Moses when he came down the mountain, he finds confusion. Israel forgot the Lord because Moses was gone, and they built a golden calf to worship.

Jesus sees a multitude surrounding His disciples. The scribes are disputing with the disciples. The scribes, as you know, were critical of Jesus and His disciples. They are 'rubbing it in', gloating over the disciples' failure.

The experience of feeling defeated is at times a real one for Christians. With Jesus, we overcome the greatest temptations, but without Him, the smallest thing may overcome us. 'Unbelief wants to grab faith by the throat and try to strangle is' [Beeke].

Think of the Psalmist's response to the taunt of the wicked in Psalm 42, "*As with a breaking of my bones, my enemies reproach me, while they say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'*" [v.10]. Or in Psalm 35:19-21,

"Let them not rejoice over me who are wrongfully my enemies; nor let them wink with the eye who hate me without a cause, for they do not speak peace . . . they also opened their mouths wide against me, and said, 'Aha, aha! Our eyes have seen it!'"

In **verse 16**, however Jesus sees. He graciously comes to the aid of His disciples by asking the scribes, *"what are you discussing with them [the disciples]?"* It's not that Jesus didn't know. But by His question, Jesus draws the crowds' attention away from His humiliated disciples to Himself. Jesus is fully aware of the weakness of His disciples. He loves them, not because they deserve His love, but because they are His chosen ones for whom He will lay down His life.

The 'fun' the scribes were having suddenly comes to an end.

No one answers Jesus' question, except one from the crowd over whom the dispute began: *"Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not"* [**verses 17-18**].

The disciples were not depending on Christ. They were relying on themselves, their own strength. That's why nothing was going right for the disciples or for the father of the boy. They need to depend on Christ in faith! This leads us to verses 19-27. Our strong Savior is strong, fully sufficient for us, therefore,

2. Come to Christ in faith [vv.19-27]

The wisdom of man fails. This is the powerful lesson here in this broken boy for all of us to see – in a life so torn apart from Satan and the effects of sin! With a painful expression, Jesus confronts the unbelief of all present, even His own disciples, in **verse 19**, *"O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me."*

"Bring him to Me..." What happens when they bring the boy to Him? Satan hates being in the presence of Christ. Christ, our Life, comes with authority. Notice, in **verse 20**, the convulsion occurs at the very moment when the demon sees Jesus. The boy is rolling on the ground, foaming at the mouth. Think about today. Why do you think people in their sin and unbelief want to stay away from Christ and His Word? Why? Christ may turn their world upside down! The light exposes everything that is dark in them. Jesus threatens Satan's domain over man who doesn't want man to come to Jesus for life.

Jesus asks the father in **verse 21**, *"How long has this been happening to him?"* Jesus listens to his story just as He wants to hear our story. It may be a 'messed up' life in pornography, or drugs, alcohol or jealousy or anger. Slavery to sin, in whatever form, defaces, mars God's image in man. It destroys. It brings death. In this father's story [**verse 22**], his son is not just falling into the fire and water, but is being thrown into it, in order to destroy him.

Verse 22: *"If You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us,"* he says to Jesus. *"If You can do anything..."* "If..." The father is doubtful if Jesus is able. Why? That's not how Jesus wants us to come to Him – doubting, as if to say, 'I'm too deep into this mess, He can't or won't help me'! The real question is not whether Jesus is able, but whether you believe as He makes plain in **verse 23**! What do you mean, *"If you can..."* says Jesus. *"All things are possible to him who believes."*

The father then cries out and says with tears, “*Lord, I believe; help me overcome my unbelief*” [verse 24]. ‘I believe, Lord, but help me. I have a hard time believing. My faith is mixed with so many fears and doubts. My faith is so imperfect.’

So it is, congregation, don’t look at your faith. Look to Christ! Christ does not look at how much faith you have [quantity] or how good your faith is [quality]. Our faith does not save us. But Christ saves us through faith. And that by God’s grace alone. As JC Ryle says, “we must use our faith. Weak, trembling, doubting, feeble as our faith may be, we must use it.” Don’t give Satan a foothold. Pray and don’t allow unbelief to keep you away from Christ. But take it Christ and pray for it like this man. But do remember: our confidence is not to be in our faith, but in Christ. Jesus answers, not according to the poverty of our faith, but according to the riches of His grace!

Jesus speaks with authority and Satan obliged to obey, at once! Jesus rebukes the unclean spirit, saying, “*Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more*” [verse 25]! The unclean spirit is forced to go out of the boy. He still makes a final attempt to destroy the work of Christ. The clash between Christ and Satan is so violent. The evil spirit comes out of the boy so violently that the boy seems dead.

Aren’t things worse now? The boy “is dead” many were saying [verse 26]. Is it because of the father’s fragile faith that things are worse? Sometimes things seem to get worse before they get better in our lives. But will we trust the word and promise of Jesus alone, in spite of what we see with our eyes! [eg. HB]. Notice verse 27, Jesus calmly takes the hand of the boy and makes him stand up. A strong Savior!

He brings life. He restores the image of God in man! There is wholeness; there is new creation; there is peace. This life Jesus obtained for us through His death and resurrection. Through the violent clash between Christ and Satan, Satan killed the Christ on the cross [“bruised His heel”]. Yet, Christ has broken the power of Satan, crushing his head, having risen from the dead! Restoration and eternal life come by believing in Christ. A gift benefits no one unless you accept it or receive it. So God’s gift of His Son will be of no benefit to us if we will not receive Him. If we refuse Christ, and will not be saved, the wrath of God must remain on us. Jesus comes to you, to save you. Trust Him – even with a fragile faith. This brings us to our third point.

3. Relying on Christ in prayer [vv.28-29]

Jesus uses this as a lesson, a teaching point, to His disciples and also to us. We read in verses 28-29 that when Jesus “*had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, “why could we not cast it out?”* He says, “*This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.*”

Jesus gathers in a house with His disciples. Those were typically times when Jesus would instruct them for their benefit. He uses their failure in not trusting Him to teach a timely lesson. They were learning the lesson, “without Me, you can do nothing” [John 15:5]. He loves them. He wants to teach them. He wants to teach them to rely on Him, even in the most difficult situations when He seems not be present. In these situations, how much more important it is to pray, even fast. The temptation may be not to pray and to rely on ourselves. Praying is the expression of our faith, of our reliance on Christ, of our fellowship with Him!

Satan may tempt you, saying ‘ah, what difference does it make. Jesus won’t listen to you. Look how bad you are. Don’t read your Bible, don’t pray.’ Sometimes you might feel the attacks of Satan so directly. Don’t listen to Satan. He wants you to focus on your self, not on Jesus. Satan flees and so do evil spirits when we place our trust in Jesus and expect our help from Him. Don’t look at your faith; fix your eyes on the risen Christ, who in

His love gave His life for you, because of your sins. Talk to Jesus, even if you don't have the right words to say. Romans 5:8 says, *"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

We live on this earth. Satan is strong, busy and active and full of malice. But Jesus is the stronger One, able to *"save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him"* [Hebrews 7:25]. What should you do when your unbelief in you is so strong or when your faith is small and weak? Pray and fight Satan by trusting Christ, His promises, His Word.

Jesus gives His promise: one day the whole world will be freed from Satan and the wicked. The reversal of the curse will be complete. Revelation 21:4-5 says, *"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."* He who sat on the throne said, *"I am making everything new!"* This is the mountain top. This is the glory. This is the new creation in all its fullness and joy!

So we may sing, "O Lord, haste the day, when my faith shall be sight. The clouds be rolled back as a scroll; The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend, Even so, it is well with my soul."

No matter how frail your faith, look to Christ. He is your strong Savior. He is God's gift to you. Receive Him by faith. In Christ, you have His promise of complete victory. The Bible says, *"The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly"* [Romans 16:20]. Amen