

Jesus Heals Boy with Unclean Spirit

The Gospel According to Mark Part 19

Mark 9:14-29

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What are some things that are true, but are hard for you to accept as truth?

- Things that, for me, are hard to grasp
 - Someone ran a marathon in under 2 hours
 - That there are billions of stars so far away

There is a bent toward doubt and skepticism in our culture.

- “Fake news”
- When an article is posted online, many people in our generation, rather than accepting it on face value, seek out the source, to see if it's a credible source. We are actually conditioned towards doubt.
- If we're honest with ourselves, we all struggle with doubts from time-to-time.
 - Did Jesus really rise from the dead?
 - Is the Bible reliable?
 - Is there a God?
 - How can both a good, all-powerful God and evil exist?
 - How do I know that Christianity is true, and not other religions?
 - Does practicing my faith really make a difference?
- These questions will keep us up at night.
- In tonight's passage, in *Mark 9:14-29*, we will study a story of Jesus interacting with a man who is a great example to us of how one should respond to doubts.

Mark 9:14-29

- *Mark 9: 14-18* - **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.”
 - Jesus, along with Peter, James, and John, just arrived back from the Mount of Transfiguration (*Mark 9:2-13*).
 - Jesus' disciples and the teachers of the law were arguing.
 - What were they arguing about?
 - David Young - “We are not told the subject matter of their argument, but we assume it has to do with the disciples' failure to exorcise the evil spirit described [in *Mark 9:18, 28*].”¹
 - Jesus was still very popular at this time. When He showed up, people ran to Him and were overwhelmed with wonder when they saw Him.
 - A man brings his son to Jesus. His son is possessed by an evil spirit (He's not just sick. Even in

¹ David M. Young, *Extreme Discipleship: Following Jesus from the Gospel of Mark* (Montgomery, AL: E-BookTime, LLC, 2007), 151.

Jesus' day people could tell the difference between someone who was sick and someone who was possessed by a demon).

- The man's son is suffering. The spirit seizes him, throws him to the ground, foams from the mouth, and gnashes teeth.
- The disciples were not able to heal the boy when the man brought his son to them.
- **Mark 9:19 - 19** "You unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."
 - Jesus is obviously frustrated at this point.
 - Jesus could be upset specifically at His disciples at this point, but He's likely upset with people in general about their lack of faith.²
 - Jesus is again telling His disciples that He won't be around forever.
 - He agrees to see the boy.
- **Mark 9:20-22 - 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."

 - "When the spirit saw Jesus" (vs. 20) - seeing Jesus triggered the spirit.
 - The boy had been like this a long time.
 - It doesn't matter how long you've struggled with something, even if you've struggled since childhood, Jesus wants to heal you and work in your life.
 - The man requests Jesus to heal his son, if he is able.
- **Mark 9:23-24 - 23** "'If you can?'" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."

24 Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

 - Jesus underscores the need for faith here. Faith in God is necessary for God to work in one's life.³
 - The father is much like us. He recognizes his need for faith. He recognizes that he does have some faith. But he also acknowledges that he lacks faith, too.
 - I don't think I need to convince most of you that you need to have faith in God. Most of you affirm that. But many of us struggle with faith and doubt.
 - The father recognizes here that we should all know. We need God's help to overcome our doubts and lack of faith.
- **Mark 9:25-27 - 25** When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure 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.

 - Like many other times in the Gospel According to Mark, Jesus has authority over and is more powerful than demons and evil spirits.
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 - When Jesus tried to exorcise the demon, at first the crowds thought the boy was dead. But he was made whole.

² Young, *Extreme Discipleship*, 151.

³ Young, *Extreme Discipleship*, 152.

- A theme in the Gospel According to Mark - When the Kingdom of God comes, people are made whole.
- *Mark 9:28-29* - **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.”
 - The disciples depended on their own strength here. They thought they could cast out this demon with their own power.
 - They needed God’s help (like we all do to overcome our obstacles).
 - Prayer has got to be central to our church.

Doubt

- Doubt is something that almost all of us will seriously struggle with at some point in our lives, and we need to know how to respond to them.
 - Natural disasters (like the tornados 2 nights ago) can lead people to doubt the existence or goodness of God.
- In this story in The Gospel According to Mark we see an example in the father of how people should respond to their doubts.
- I will briefly discuss three unhealthy ways to respond to doubt, and 3 better ways to respond to doubt.

How not to handle doubts

- Don’t think you’re the only person to ever experience doubt.
 - Raise your hand if you have ever experienced some sort of doubt in your life?
 - Doubt is a part of the human condition. From the beginning of the Bible to the end we see people struggling with doubt. Doubt is a trait of humanity. To be human is to doubt.
 - Examples in scripture of people who doubt (even heroes of the faith)
 - Adam and Eve - *Genesis 3:1-6* (the first people to doubt).
 - The Fall of humanity was a result of doubt. The first sin ever committed was the result of doubting God’s word.
 - John the Baptist
 - Jesus said of John the Baptist, “I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John” (*Luke 7:28*). John the Baptist was the greatest human, but he doubted.
 - *Matthew 11:2* - “Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’”
 - Peter
 - Peter was an amazing character in the New Testament and did amazing things. One night he and the other disciples saw Jesus walking on the water. So he walked, too. But he doubted and fell in.
 - *Matthew 14:31* - Jesus - “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”
 - Doubt is a part of the human condition. We all doubt.
 - Don’t feel bad if you experience doubt. Don’t feel guilty for having questions. You’re in good company if you have doubts. It’s normal to doubt.

- Don't ignore your doubts.
 - There are answers to your questions!
 - And, again, you're not the only person to struggle with the doubts you have. There are many people who have thought through your struggles, and there are resources to help you with your doubts.
 - Seek answers for your doubts.
- Don't leave Jesus because you have questions, concerns, or doubts.
 - Asking questions and experiencing does not mean you're leaving the faith.

3 Ways to Respond to Your Doubts

Trust God with your doubt.

- The father was honest with Jesus. He said, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (*Mark 9:24*).
- It's ok to say, "I don't know."
 - *Job 38:1-18*
 - Job questions God. But then God turns it around and starts questioning Job. God expresses to Job that He was in the beginning of creation, that He knows all things, that He is all-powerful.
 - It's ok for us to not know everything. God does not expect us to know everything.
- We serve a trustworthy God.
- Illustration of someone falling from a cliff
 - Timothy Keller - "The faith that changes the life and connects to God is best conveyed by the word 'trust.' Imagine you are on a high cliff and lose your footing and begin to fall. Just beside you as you fall is a branch sticking out of the very edge of the cliff. It is your only hope and it is more than strong enough to support your weight. How can it save you? If your mind is filled with intellectual certainty that the branch can support you, but you don't actually reach out and grab it, you are lost. If your mind is instead filled with doubts and uncertainty that the branch can hold you, but you reach out and grab it anyway, you will be saved. Why? It is not the strength of your faith but the object of your faith that actually saves you. Strong faith in a weak branch is fatally inferior to weak faith in a strong branch."⁴
 - The object of our faith is more important than the amount of faith we have in it, as long as we act on that faith.
- You might have doubts. You might not have a strong faith in God. But a small amount of faith in God is infinitely better than a lot of faith in anything else.
- Mustard seed faith (*Matthew 17:20*)

Seek answers to your questions and doubt.

- The father sought out Jesus and asked Him for help. "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (*Mark 9:24*)
- Ask God. Say to Him "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

⁴ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 244-245.

- Ask, seek, find - *Matthew 7:7-11*
 - ⁷“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”
 - Jesus encourages us to ask God for help.
- Doubting Thomas - *John 20:24-29*
- “I believe; help my unbelief.” *Mark 9:24*
- So many of the Lament Psalms question God.
 - *Psalms 13*
 - Be brutally honest with God. It’s better to question God than to ignore God.
 - I love that this is included in scripture. The fact that God allowed His people expressing doubts to be included in scripture is encouraging.
- We do not have all the answers. But we do have some answers. In fact, we have a lot of answers.
 - Most of the questions you ask, have already been asked by many people. Many thoughtful Christians have reflected on your questions and doubts.
 - There are resources and books that address your questions.
 - There are people who would be happy to talk with you about their struggles with doubt.
- Examining doubts will strengthen your faith.
 - Two great quotes from Tim Keller in *The Reason for God*
 - “A faith without some doubts is like a human body without any antibiotics in it. People who blithely go through life too busy or indifferent to ask hard questions about why they believe as they do will find themselves defenseless against either the experience of tragedy or the probing questions of a smart skeptic. A person’s faith can collapse overnight if she has failed over the years to listen patiently to her own doubts, which should only be discarded after long reflection.”⁵
 - “Believers should acknowledge and wrestle with doubt--not only their own but their friends’ and neighbors’. It is no longer sufficient to hold beliefs just because you inherited them. Only if you struggle long and hard with objections to your faith will you be able to provide grounds for your belief to skeptics, including yourself, that are plausible rather than ridiculous or offensive.”⁶
 - (In my opinion, the price of *The Reason for God* is worth it just for the introduction.)
- It will take work to examine doubts.
 - Apologetics
- This is a process to “own your own faith, rather than your parents’ faith.”
- Faith doesn’t mean blind faith. There are good reasons to trust what we believe.

⁵ Keller, *The Reason for God*, xvii.

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Continue to worship, even in your doubt. (Matthew 28:16-20)

- *Matthew 28:17* - “**16** Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. **17** When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. **18** Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”
- The disciples literally saw Jesus’ literal resurrected body, but still doubted. But they also worshipped.
- The passage does not say, “Those who did not doubt worshipped.”
- Worship and doubt are not incompatible.
- Continue to worship God even if you’re doubting.
- “This is How I Fight My Battles”⁷ by
 - The lyrics are so simple, but so powerful. “This is how I fight my battles. It might look like I’m surrounded but I’m surrounded by you.”
- Worship when you doubt. Worship will help your doubt. Because the God you worship is greater than your doubt.
- Worship reminds you that God is great and love. God’s love and greatness and holiness is greater than any of your doubts.

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4CwKroZtCl>