

Mark 9:14-32

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[0 : 00] I like us this morning to look back at the passage that we read in Mark's Gospel, chapter 9, the healing of the boy with the evil spirit, and look to see what we can learn from God, from his word, and from his character, as it's revealed to us in the person of Jesus as he heals this boy.

And I think in the light or in the spirit of the psalm that we've just been singing, it would be true of us to admit that we struggle sometimes.

We struggle in our spirituality, we struggle in our faith, we struggle to worship, we struggle to serve, we struggle to understand God and his character.

Often we don't see clearly as we wish we could see and we think others can see spiritually. We struggle to believe with faith that we would like to have.

And probably most of all we struggle to see God's perspective and his analysis of our own condition and of the society in which we live and of the way in which the world is going and moving.

[1 : 17] We often are looking at starting from ourselves and trying to work God into the equation. And so sometimes we find it difficult to fit him in rather than taking God and his word and seeing his word and recognising it as truth.

So we have these struggles. And the great thing about this psalm is that it admits to these struggles. It doesn't always think that we're squeaky clean and that we've got no problems and it's all triumphant and it's all about faith that we can breeze along in our lives of faith.

It does express great struggle and difficulty and trial, which is a great thing for us to remember. And here we find that in this story, a desperate father.

And I don't think it's right for us to lose sight of that fact. It's a human interest story. And here we have a family who are absolutely struggling with life.

They're struggling with what has been placed in front of them. They're struggling with their day-to-day existence. A boy and his dad. That's all we know. We're told in Luke 9 in the same parallel story that this is an only child.

[2 : 38] There isn't a big family. There's just only this boy and his dad. We don't know where the mum is. We don't know whether he's a widower. We don't know whether she's left because she couldn't cope with this problematic and difficult child.

But it's a story of desperation. And we kind of read through it in the comfort of a Sunday morning. We think, yes, this is a Bible story. I wonder what Jesus is telling us. And yet we need to remember that here is a real people with real struggles as they come to face Jesus.

It's not clinical and clean cut and sanctified. It's a real difficulty that we're faced with. This man comes to the disciples and to Jesus because he's desperate.

He's really struggling with the situation that he finds himself in. This boy of his who from childhood has known illness and demon possession of some kind or another demonic influence.

You know, we mustn't just brush this aside as being a pre-medical, pre-science definition of someone, say, with epilepsy. We know that certainly isn't the case. This is Dr. Luke.

[3 : 49] It's talking Dr. Luke about the situation. And we know in a different Matthew account that they recognize demon possession and epilepsy and different medical illnesses as being separate.

And it's not just a kind of old-fashioned description of someone with some kind of fitting or epilepsy. It says someone, whatever else he has, is plagued by demon possession, evil affecting him in his life.

And we know that in the Bible and today that many people's lives can seem to be destroyed or made desperate through illness and strong demonic influence.

Maybe not as clearly as it would have been in biblical times in terms of demon possession. But nonetheless, we recognize desperation here, don't we?

We recognize a family that are really struggling with their situation. Platitudes and throwing Bible verses at them wouldn't really help their situation.

[5 : 00] Here, the man cries out for help. He is in a pitiable condition. And he comes before Jesus looking for Jesus' help.

We're told in the Matthew account that he falls to his knees before Jesus. He's reverentially recognizing in humility that Jesus is his last resort.

Jesus is the only one who can heal him. He's alone. He's a helpless father. Father. And he's helpless not just as a father, but he's helpless for his child.

You know, as a father, as a parent, you know, that's the worst of all feelings in the universe. Not so much that we're helpless for ourselves, but you come to live your life and your children too.

And if you're helpless for them, then that is a truly awful place to be. And here is a father who feels totally helpless to redeem his child's situation and to make it better.

[6 : 06] And he really is in his last resort because he's tried with the disciples and they can't help. They're too busy arguing about the rights and wrongs theologically of the situation with the different teachers of the law who are watching.

Arguing so loudly that they drown out the man's weeping cries. Desperate father who comes to Jesus Christ for help.

And we know that evil in this world leads to despair. It might not exactly look like the evil here. It might not reveal itself in the same way as it does in this particular situation.

But we know that there is despair in the lives of many people. And that despair will often have a spiritual genesis.

It has a spiritual dimension. That maybe not overtly, as in this case, but certainly below the surface, Satan is involved. And Satan is there to bring despair and destruction into everybody's life.

[7 : 20] That has been his intent from the beginning. And that is always his intent. That his destructiveness permeates all of life. And it has a handle in our own sinful separation and independent spirit from God.

So that sin, as it reveals itself, loves everything that God hates. And brings destruction for God wants life.

And brings despair where God offers hope. And everything that we see around us that smacks of despair, there is a spiritual dimension and a loss or a problem with separation from God and sinfulness that is very real and very significant.

And, you know, if we look around us and sometimes into our own hearts as well as Christians, but when we look around us as well, we recognize that despair does mark many people's lives to a greater or lesser degree.

Whether it be in unhappy relationships or in family situations or in illnesses that they face or in old age or in various degrees of helplessness one way or another.

[8 : 42] Or with this whole kind of materialistic, driven, busy world in which we live, the pursuit of wealth. All these things can mask and can sometimes hide or can sometimes reveal a real despair in people's lives.

It might not be as extreme as the situation here, but nonetheless, very real. And often, I think the danger is as Christians, like the disciples, we can't see it.

For one reason or another, the disciples couldn't really see the root of this boy's difficulty. They couldn't see where the answer lay.

They couldn't understand what was happening and why they couldn't be allowed, as it were, by God to heal this guy. For whatever reason, they were blind to the reality of what they needed to do.

And we can often similarly be blind to the despair in people's lives and sometimes in our own lives.

[9 : 53] We can look for unspiritual or worldly answers to the despair we see around us. And we can believe in spiritual formulas, neat texts, theological truisms that are a bit like the disciples didn't work.

And we can end up with people's despair, spending our time arguing, like they did, about theology and about worship and about methods and about changing things and about acting in right ways. And we lose sight of the very simplicity of the gospel, which is that in people's despair, their greatest need is for Jesus, the person.

Jesus is the answer. And sometimes as Christians, we've lost that even for ourselves in our despair, in our struggles. Jesus is the last port of call that we have.

He's the last person we go to because we have a myriad of answers. We have a raft of theological hoops that we can jump through. We have all kinds of ritualistic behavior that we seek to do.

[11 : 11] And we leave Jesus out of the equation. We have lost sight of his power and his authority. And we can often be like that in the despair of other people's lives.

Jesus has given us a message of good news. And it's a message of healing. And it's a message of power. And it's a message of transformation. That Jesus is the one that your friends and your family and your colleagues need.

They may not have demon possession. They may not present themselves as people who throw themselves into fire and who are absolutely desperate and have lost the ability to speak.

And all these physical demonstrations of despair. But nonetheless, Jesus is the answer for them and their need. And there is a deep-seated spiritual despair that they face and have, even if they don't know it.

And part of the importance as Christians of living close to Jesus is that we discern. And we see people opening up to us as we share with them and as we get to know them to such a degree that we can offer them Jesus as the answer.

[12 : 29] As that we can see that he is the answer. I wonder if we don't do that very much because we don't really believe it. Jesus doesn't need to change my life very much.

I'm not really despairing. I've never despaired. I'm a good boy. I'm a good girl. I've been brought up in a church. I've done my best. I'm as good as the person next to me. I've never cried out. I don't understand Psalm 6.

I have no concept of Psalm 6. What is he talking about? About despairing. About being under God's judgment. About feeling just opposed to every corner. Don't know what it means. Never genuinely despaired.

Never really needed Jesus. I've simply accepted him because my mum and dad have told me. Because I know it's the right thing to do. But I've kept him at arm's length. And he's really quite a weak saviour.

He's irrelevant really to my day-to-day living. Get the occasional rumble of conscience here in church. Occasionally praise him sweetly.

[13 : 26] But genuinely and generally he has no part in my life. And I wonder sometimes if like the disciples we lose sight of that utter and complete simplicity.

And transforming power of Jesus. Because we don't feel that much need of transformation. And we don't draw ourselves closer to the light which exposes our own darkness.

That may be or may not be the case. We leave the Holy Spirit to work and to challenge our own hearts about that. But we do see a desperate father, don't we?

Let's not lose sight of that. Desperation in this situation. It's not clean cut. And it's not all easy running.

But more importantly we see Jesus in the story. He comes into the story late. And I want to use quite dramatic language here.

[14 : 25] Because I think the passage merits it. And here we see Jesus here. Clearly walking towards hell. That is exactly what Jesus is doing here.

He's walking towards hell. It's been after the transfiguration. That amazing moment when he hears God's assurance of love and pleasure in him.

He's sensed the glory that he knew in heaven. He's felt it as a human. He's been there and he's discussed what lies ahead, hasn't he? With Elijah and with Moses.

He's talked about what lies ahead. But it's been a great, encouraging, brilliant moment for him on the mountaintop. A mountaintop experience.

And he walks down from that place of mystery and of majesty and of glory. Where he's been reminded of why he's come to earth. And just like Moses before him who walked down the mountain.

[15 : 27] He walks into chaos. Just like Moses who, oh, I must have been so excited. I would have told that. I saw God and I've got the Ten Commandments. And it's brilliant. And they've come out of Egypt for a reason.

And he comes in a worshipping an idol. Dancing about like mad people. Forgotten everything about God. Chaos. And so Jesus walks into the situation of chaos.

Of noise. Of arguments. Of gloating. Of unbelief. Of stupidity. Of darkness. You can see it. You know, you can see it as he walks towards it.

This situation. And we need to remember that he kept on walking towards that situation. I'm sure there's different moments when Jesus must have felt, oh, I'm going home.

I just want to go back to heaven. People just simply don't see. They don't understand. They don't appreciate. Even my disciples who have been teaching for these years, they still don't see.

[16:34] It must have been tempting for them to simply walk back. Particularly here. He knows what he's going towards. He knows what he's facing on our behalf. He's walking towards hell.

He's walking towards Satan. He's walking towards the cross. And here is something that is a tangible, as it were, challenge to him. Right as he walks that way.

But Satan's authority, Satan's power over people, people's inability to change it. Come on, Jesus. Satan says, deal with this situation.

Get on home. He keeps walking. And for that we praise him and rejoice. If we don't do anything else today, we praise him for that fact.

But as we look on at Jesus here, we also recognize in verse 15 that there's simply something about Jesus.

[17:32] Inexplicable. There's something about Jesus. As soon as the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

Now, it's inexpressible. It doesn't say why they were overwhelmed with wonder. He walked into other crowds and they were underwhelmed. But here they're overwhelmed with wonder about Jesus. There's something about Jesus here.

Is it because he's come down from the mountaintop and there's physically still something that makes him more God-like? Well, we don't know. But there's something about Jesus that brings people to him and overwhelms them with wonder.

Only, I think, in our lives, by faith can we share that sense of overwhelming desire and wonder for Jesus.

He's very ordinary to other people. People that we tell that we're Christians too. They think, well, why do you believe in a dead prophet from 2,000 years ago from Israel? But for us, when our eyes are opened, when we are converted to Jesus Christ, there is a sense in which we are overwhelmed by him.

[18:48] And again, just as it's easy to lose the centrality of Jesus and his power to transform people's lives, I think it's very easy for us to lose that something about Jesus.

To be underwhelmed by him. Or to sit and expect, come on, preacher, make me overwhelmed with Jesus. Entertain me to the place where I love Jesus more.

And where I explain things in such a way that I leave rubbing my hands in his glory. But it's Jesus who overwhelms us, not the preaching of Jesus per se.

It's our own relationship with Jesus and our ongoing recognition of Jesus and our interaction with Jesus and our relationship with Jesus that will overwhelm us.

There's something about Jesus. And here we recognize him as a life giver and as the teacher, don't we? If we take the bigger picture, because there's a, undoubtedly in all of the gospels, there's a bigger picture.

[19:53] It's not just a small picture of the healing of an individual, but there's a bigger picture. None more so here than Jesus as he heads towards the cross. It's, he's teaching or he's preparing the disciples to consider his walk to the cross and his resurrection.

You know, after the end of it all, in verse 30 he says, he was teaching them and he said, the son of man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him and after three days he will rise. You see, he says that on the back of a fantastically powerful revelation of his power, of his character and of his work and of why he's here.

And he's wanting them to know, yes, he's going to face death, but he's going to be raised on the third day. And that is vital for their understanding and for our salvation. Coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration here, there's a scent of victory.

And there's a worrying failure for Satan. Here's this poor family who are bound by the power of darkness and by sin.

And Jesus Christ pours out mercy and pity on them and demonstrates in his own unique way, not just to them, but to the disciples. And as it spread out to us, why he came.

[21 : 22] He didn't come just to be a nice preacher and a nice teacher and a good example. He came to die for you, for me.

Big picture. He came to deal with despair, didn't he? That's the message of the gospel. It's despair that he comes to deal with. You will never come to Christ if you're not a Christian today.

If you never despair. If you're content and if you're self-fulfilled and if you're self-reliant and if you're self-centered, you will never seek a savior.

You'll never come on the basis of theological truth. Only, it will never, you will never come to Christ on an intellectual ascent to the gospel.

There must be this sense of despair, of need, of lostness, before we will come to the one who alone can deal with that.

[22 : 23] He came to deal with dis-ease, with disease, to defeat darkness and sin and corruption and selfishness and lust and pride and lostness in our 21st century sophisticated, modern, scientific lives.

Yet often we can't see that. We've relegated him to the third division of unimportance. There's powerful implications of Jesus and why he came and what our response to him is or not, I guess.

You know, for this one family, there's a powerful infreaction, isn't there? Right away. Can you imagine the life change for this family? The father didn't need to be afraid anymore when he lit the house fire.

Oh, he made giggle and laugh at that. That was real for him. His son wasn't going to throw himself in it. I'm not saying for a moment that they didn't have any more struggles, that there wasn't a whole massive learning process for that young man to engage in.

But what healing, what joy, what transformation. They would never forget that day of meeting with Jesus. His family's life was transformed.

[23 : 54] You know, as Christians, there is nothing greater in life, I don't think. Well, for me as a Christian anyway, and I hope for you as well, acquiesce with this, than seeing somebody who we love and who we've prayed for and who we've seen as blind spiritually coming to faith and their life being transformed.

Is that not simply the greatest thing that we ever experienced? If it's not, we need to ask ourselves about who Christ is and what he means to us.

But to see someone who for years has said no thanks, for there's been a red light and who simply can't see, who we've lost the little hair we have over, coming to faith, that can't be explained in any other way except by the touch of Jesus Christ in their lives.

So that they now see, once I was blind but now I can see, that is, that is worth. I can die tomorrow. I can die happy.

That means everything, absolutely everything. One soul, one person, that God in his grace has condescendingly allowed us to affect by our life and by our witness.

[25 : 20] that is wonderful. You know, Jesus, the scent of victory for somebody as it was for this family, is magnificent. You know, that is the greatest evangelistic motivation for any of us here, is having seen that and wanting it in the lives of others.

it's not about the kind of evangelism we do or the programs that we set in place. It's about our heart and about wanting others to share what we have.

Yeah, programs might help, but programs never converted anyone and the disciples argued about programs and about something with the teachers of the law and it made no difference.

So, this scent of victory and this message of Jesus had a real transforming effect on the life of this family and for everyone who will put their trust in Jesus.

But also for us in our struggles, we can learn a great deal from this passage. You know, there's a great verse in verse 24 where Jesus asks the question, if you can, Jesus says, everything is possible for him who believes.

[26 : 37] And the man replies beautifully, I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief. What a wonderful, paradoxical prayer that is open for every single one of us.

I do believe, oh, but I'm such an unbeliever. You know, that cuts through everything, doesn't it? It cuts through all our lack of knowledge and all our faithlessness and all our sense of despair and the way that we get frozen by our impotence spiritually and we simply pray that prayer.

I do believe Jesus, but please, help me overcome my unbelief. If you can. We struggle, don't we? Jesus, the man struggled.

He'd seen so much failure. He'd been brought, he'd been brought to the point, to the mountaintop of hope so often. He'd been all these people. He'd tried all these drugs and here he was, the disciples couldn't make a difference.

If you can, Jesus, your disciples have failed, maybe you can make a difference. Last result. And he experienced the power of Jesus. I'm sure that we struggle.

[27 : 42] I know I certainly struggle with that same, if, if you can. I'm not sure if you can. You change that, my friend's heart, if you can.

I'm not sure. He's real. If it's genuine. Christ says and encourages us to pray that prayer as it's recorded for us.

I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief. In other words, we go with all our ifs and maybe of all different kinds, spiritual questions we have, take them with our faithlessness and ask for more faith. You can't work up faith. It doesn't come by coming to more church services or reading more chapters of the Bible. It comes by asking the giver, the author of faith.

Ask him, Lord, I believe, but I want to believe more because I'm so full of unbelief. Ask him. Go to Jesus. Can you see where Jesus is pointing? He's pointing absolutely and entirely and completely to himself.

[28 : 51] you do not have because you do not ask. Faith is God's gift. I can't believe I've been coming to church for years.

I've sat here week after week. I'm spiritually dead. I can't do anything until God chooses to do it to me. If I'm to be saved, I'll be saved.

Nonsense. You will not stand before God in the day of judgment and get away with that excuse because it's a half-truth. Because all who come to Jesus Christ and who ask him will receive.

We're to ask him for faith. We're to ask him for life. We're to ask him for salvation. We're to ask him for forgiveness. We're to move. It's urgent.

It's important. We struggle to believe we are to go to Christ for the faith to sustain us and to live our Christian lives.

[30 : 04] I think today is a harder day than, maybe everyone sees this in every generation, every country, in every situation. I'm sure they do and maybe God knows about that and laughs from heaven.

But I think this is a very difficult day in generation in which to believe. Satan has employed tremendously subtle ways to stop us believing.

Primarily comfort, wealth, satisfaction, peace. No real problems, no hassles, no troubles at a societal, corporate level.

Science, intelligence, sophistication, atheism, rampant in the secular society. Not easy for us to believe. Not easy for our children to believe.

Not easy for our teenagers to believe. We're going to have to go back to Jesus Christ to ask him for faith when we struggle to believe. But also, I think, when we struggle to serve.

[31 : 04] Because it doesn't just speak about this man and this boy. It speaks about the disciples. They were failed here. They failed to serve Christ as they should have.

They were argumentative. They were more concerned about their pride and about their standing with the teachers of the law than they were about this guy. They turned his back on this guy. Ah, we'll try to heal you, but it doesn't work.

Hi, by the way, there's eight points in Calvinism or whatever. They started arguing with these teachers of the law. And those in need were sidelined and were abandoned.

Maybe they were indisciplined. They were certainly indisciplined in prayer. It was easy-believers. Well, we stand in the shadow of Jesus. We'll heal him. No problem to us. But there was a real neglect and a spiritual weakness as they struggled here to serve.

And Jesus points out exactly for us why that is the case. Why couldn't we drive him out? Verse 29, this kind only comes out by prayer. By prayer.

[32 : 10] He's pointing to himself again, isn't he? He's saying, you know, it's not about contacts, it's not about experience, it's not about background, it's not about knowledge, it's about dependence.

It's about a recognition again and again and again that we are humble servants and that we need Jesus Christ. seeing our service.

These disciples were servants of God, they were his followers. Why do we struggle? Why do we struggle with holiness, with obedience, with grace?

could it be that we've become self-reliant? our gifts, our abilities, our experience, our background, it worked in the past, God will use me again.

but we don't ask him and we don't seek him and we don't depend on him. So that we move from being childlike in our dependence and we become quite self-reliant and knowledgeable and theological.

[33 : 23] far too theological to worry about needy people. We want to argue in the floor of the church or in deep theological discussion groups or at the assembly or important places where other important Christians are and show how important we are and we lose sight of need and we lose sight of power.

we become vacuous Christians all talk and no action who debate the finer points of how many angels we can balance on the head of a pin.

Easy for us to get into that way of thinking and losing sight of our daily dependence on Christ and prayerfulness. It's prayer that changes people's lives and prayer that changes us there's no doubt that God's word reminds us of what God wants us to know and what he wants us to see.

He wants us to see the power of transformation the importance of people who are despairing being given the answer of Jesus and in our own faith struggles to go to Jesus.

I don't think there's any easy answers I don't think sometimes we'll be given answers to our struggles but I do believe that we will be overwhelmed with wonder when we go to Jesus.

[34 : 56] We'll be back and in our own ...urers ...

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