

Mark 9:14-29 “Weak Faith. Strong Savior.” 9/11/22

Outline:

Matthew 14:30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.”³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

1) Too weak (9:14-19)

Mark 5:3 He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, ⁴ for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him.

Mark 8:12 ...And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, ‘Why does this generation seek a sign?’

2) Not the problem, but certainly the answer (9:20-27)

R.T. France, “The apparent *carte blanche* offered by [‘all things are possible for one who believes’], as of many other NT assurances about prayer, may need to be tempered by pastoral advice, but it puts the emphasis where it should be, on the unlimited power of God in whom faith is placed; it rules out the suggestion that any force, certainly not the present demonic opponent, can be too much for God.

But such assurances naturally promote an introspective concern as to how real the petitioner’s faith is, and the father’s famously paradoxical reply captures the tortured self-doubt of many sincere pray-ers.

Belief and unbelief are mixed in most of us, and perhaps Mark would encourage us to notice that this common condition proved in the event to be no obstacle to his request being granted. At least he put his [unbelief] in the right perspective by not dwelling on it but asking Jesus to help with it. His belief, however uncertain, was all that was needed, and from this point he plays no

further part in the narrative, so that all the attention falls where it should, on the power of Jesus.”
(*The Gospel of Mark*, NIGTC, 368)

3) Who is sufficient? (9:28-29)

William Lane, “The disciples had been tempted to believe that the gift they had received from Jesus (Ch. 6:7) was in their control and could be exercised at their disposal. This was a subtle form of unbelief, for it encouraged them to trust in themselves rather than in God. They had to learn that their previous success in expelling demons provided no guarantee of continued power. Rather the power of God must be asked for...in radical reliance upon his ability alone. When faith confronts the demonic, God’s omnipotence is its sole assurance, and God’s sovereignty is its only restriction.” (*The Gospel of Mark*, 335-336)

John 15:4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

2Cor. 2:14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. ¹⁵ For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶ to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?

2Cor. 3:4 Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, ⁶ who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant...

2Cor. 12:9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

4) Believing doubt?

Barnabas Piper writes on the subject in *Help My Unbelief: Why Doubt is Not the Enemy of Faith*. He summarizes with these contrasts between “unbelieving doubt” and “believing doubt”:

1. Unbelieving doubt asks questions in order to challenge.
Believing doubt asks questions in order to learn.
2. Unbelieving doubt takes questions to anyone but Jesus.
Believing doubt takes questions directly to Jesus.
3. Unbelieving doubt questions God’s character because He is beyond our understanding.
Believing doubt trusts in God’s character because He is beyond our understanding.
4. Unbelieving doubt says, “not Your will, but mine be done.”
Believing doubt says, “not my will, but Yours be done.”

5) Taking your doubts to Jesus