

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
March 6, 2016

Lesson Text: Mark 9:14-29
Lesson Title: Powerful Faith

Introduction

If there is one word associated universally with religion and even with Christianity it is the word faith. If there is one word misunderstood universally with religion and even with Christianity it is the word faith.

Christians are a people of faith, but it is obvious not everyone who claims to be a Christian understands the meaning of the word. When we say Christians are a people of faith, what do we mean? Do we mean we are saved because we believe there is a God? According to James 2:19, even the demons believe and acknowledge there is a God. Do we mean if we believe hard enough and long enough we can make certain things happen? Is sickness because of a lack of faith? Is it possible to have faith in faith?

The Word of Faith Movement, more commonly known as the Health and Wealth Gospel, has contributed much to the ignorance of biblical faith. Lack of biblical study on the part of believers also contributes to the current misunderstanding of true biblical faith. Because of the pride and financial gain associated with the Word of Faith Movement, it is highly unlikely they will ever come to the knowledge of truth regarding biblical faith. The true Christian however, is without excuse for not understanding and living by faith.

Faith is definable and understandable. It is a vital part of the believer's life here on earth. True biblical faith is simply this, believing what God said simply because He said it. It has nothing to do with believing harder or speaking what the false prophets call "a word of faith." It is simply believing what God has spoken in the sixty-six books of the Bible, His written, inspired, and revealed Word.

Mark 9:14-29 deals with the subject of biblical faith in the lives of several individuals and situations. Jesus is present as He returns from the mount of transfiguration. The father of a physically and spiritually stricken son is in this story. Some scribes from Jerusalem are also mentioned. They are questioning Jesus' disciples and pointing indicting fingers at the disciples for their inability to help this father and his son. The stricken son is in this story. He represents all who are hurting and helpless in the world. The discouraged disciples are in this story wondering what went wrong. Their absent faith is a major part of this story. Finally, although not mentioned, every believer is in

this story. Like the disciples, Christians and the church is doing little if anything to give spiritual help to those in need.

Powerful Faith and the Disciples Failure (Mark 9:14-19)

This story is told from the perspective of Peter, James, and John, (the inner circle) who had descended down from the mountain of transfiguration. At the base of the mountain, the 3 disciples reunite with the other 9, a curious crowd gathers, an anxious father hopelessly awaits, a convulsing boy remains demon possessed, and a group of people listen to indicting scribes describe this horrible hopeless mess.

Verse 14-15

“And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him.”

Apparently the scribes were so engrossed in their discussion with Jesus’ disciples, they did not notice as Jesus descended from the mountain to their location. The words “and straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him,” seem to indicate they were taken by surprise at his arrival. When they “beheld him,” or noticed Jesus was there, they immediately ran to Him and “saluted him” engaging him in conversation about the inability of His disciples to help this troubled boy.

Verse 16

“And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them?”

Jesus’ first words in this story demonstrates strong emotion when He asks the scribes, “What question ye with them?” Basically, Jesus says, “A father is heartbroken, a boy is demon possessed, and my disciples are embarrassed, and you are standing here talking about it.” Our Lord wants us to see when there is a work to be done there is no benefit in standing around talking about it. Faith involves more than thinking about something or talking about something. There is a demon possessed boy having seizures and throwing himself into the fire and Jesus asks the scribes, “Why are you standing here talking about it?”

Verse 17-18

“And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; And wheresoever he taketh him, he tearth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.”

The “scribes” did not answer Jesus’ question, but the anxious father did. The father’s words are most interesting. He said, “Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit” (Mark 9:17). The father knew he had not brought his son to Jesus personally, but in bringing him to the disciples of Jesus the anxious father concluded that he had brought him to the Master Himself. In other words, he expected Jesus’ disciples to be able to do something about this situation.

Note: In the eastern culture a man’s disciples were considered to be his messengers who possessed his wisdom, his authority, and his motives. The nine disciples had received the boy in Christ stead who was on the mountain but they were lacking in faith and power to help him.

The father describes his son’s pitiful condition to Jesus. It is assumed these are the same words he said to Jesus’ disciples. Is there a more pathetic picture in the gospels than this father’s description of his son? His son was unable to speak, overcome by the evil satanic spirits without any ability to resist. “He” or the evil spirit of the devil “teareth” or caused self-destructive behavior in the boy. He foamed at the mouth and ground his teeth. He literally “pineth away” meaning he was withering away to nothing.

As the father helplessly watched all of this he is terrified by the seizers that threw his son in the fire. We can only imagine how he felt when the disciples promised more than they could deliver. They tried but “they could not” cast the demon out of the boy. The father pleads his case to Jesus.

Powerful Faith and the Son’s Deliverance (Mark 9:19-27)

Verse 19

“He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.”

When Jesus cried, “O faithless generation...” who was He speaking too? It had to be His disciples. The words “faithless generation” connects them to the children of Israel who failed to trust God in the wilderness from Egypt to Canaan (Numbers 14). When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with God’s law he faced unbelief (Exodus 32). Jesus has come down from the mount of transfiguration and He faces their unbelief. He is troubled at the lack of faith.

This is where we get down to the real question concerning powerful faith. We need to ask ourselves, “Do we really believe the gospel? Do we truly understand faith as God defines it in His Word?” Jesus uses the word “long” twice in this verse signifying the length of time he has taught and ministered in their presence. Time is short and His patience will not be forever.

Commenting on verse 19, Alexander Maclaren writes, *“Jesus’ words at first sight looked almost like a momentary flash of indignation, as if for once a spot had come on His cheek, a spot of anger, but I do not think that we shall find it so if we look a little more closely. The first thing that seems to be in Jesus’ words is not anger, indeed, but rather an expression of His infinite pain, because of man’s faithlessness. The element of personal sorrow is most obvious here. It is not only that He is sad for their sakes that they are so unreceptive and He can do so little for them, but that He feels the chilling effect of an atmosphere where there is no sympathy.”*

The disciples underestimated the power of evil. They had seen Jesus deal with evil in the world a few times but when met head on with this boy they realized what they were up against. Maybe they thought since this was a young boy the case would not require as much faith as someone like the demoniac of Gadara, or Mary Magdalene who was possessed of seven devils.

Our Lord’s disciples also had a misunderstanding of faith in regard to mission. The disciples believed they controlled by the power of God rather than being controlled by the power of God. Who controls faith? Who controls how faith operates? Is it a few wealthy preachers and media ministries? Faith does not belong to an exclusive group of people or a certain denomination. Faith belongs to God and is given unto us for life and ministry to the hurting, hopeless, and helpless.

Verse 20-21

“And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child.”

At Jesus’ command, *“bring him unto me”* (verse 19), they “brought him unto him.” When the evil “spirit” saw the boy was being taken to Jesus, it threw the boy into a convulsion. Mark describes what happened with terribly graphic words, “tare him...fell on the ground...wallowed foaming.” This is proof of the hatred the demonic kingdom has for Christ and the power of biblical faith.

Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long is it ago since this came unto him?” The father answered, “Since he was a child.” The father immediately sensed the compassion of Jesus toward his son. Truly, no one ever cared like Jesus!

Verse 22

“And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.”

The father further described how the demonic spirit would cause his son to “cast himself into the fire, and into the waters.” Open fires and water were common as cooking and cleaning were often done in public places. Satan’s desire was to “destroy” the young boy, possess him totally and eventually assign his body and soul to eternal damnation. In tenderness and sincerity the father said, “...but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.” Here is where the story really gets interesting. The boy has suffered some form of satanic convulsion. The evil spirit has flexed his muscles in Jesus’ presence. The father has cried out for help. Now if you can believe this, Jesus is going to give the father of this boy a lesson in grammar. Powerful faith is going to rest on a lesson in grammar! What kind of a Savior gives a lecture on grammar in the face of such satanic power and unbelief?

Verse 23

“Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.”

The father has said to Jesus, “If thou canst do any thing...” In other words, “If you can help us, help us.” Not “will you help us,” but “can you help us.” He is not questioning Jesus’ willingness to help them but His ability to help them. Remember, Jesus’ disciples were willing but not able to help this father.

Jesus’ answer is “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.” What does Jesus mean? Some say it means if this father could only believe his son was going to get better, then he would have gotten better. Is that what Jesus means? No. Think about Paul and his thorn in the flesh. Do you think he failed to believe God for his thorn to be removed? He prayed three times about the thorn and still had to live with it. Others say it means faith controls God and if you have enough faith, God is required to do what you ask. If you “believe” God for a million dollars, can you wake up in the morning and find a million dollars in your bank account? If you are bald, can you believe God for hair and discover in the morning you have a full head of hair? If your child or spouse has died and been buried for a year can you believe God to raise them and awake in the morning to be reunited with them? Do you see how foolish and silly that type of biblical interpretation is?

“If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth” means whatever God has promised in His Word, if believed, is possible.” “All things” means everything in God’s will. It means it is possible for me to bear my cross and suffer loss if I “believe.” It means I can overcome evil with good and be poor in spirit. It means I can be content with such things as I have. It means I can turn the other cheek and go the extra mile. It means whether I am rich or poor, sick or healthy, I rejoice in the Lord and say with Job, “*the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away, blessed be the name of the LORD*” (Job 1:21).

If you “believe,” simply trust what God has said in His holy, written, Word, anything is “possible.” Faith is solely about what is written in God’s Word. Faith must never go farther than God’s clear promises.

Verse 24

“And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”

Here is one of the most encouraging verses in Scripture. The question of this tormented boy being healed rested in his “father” believing Christ had the ability to heal him. This father is not believing harder. He is not speaking a word of faith. He is not holding on or holding out. Here is an honest man, an honest father. He declared publicly he “believed” Jesus could help his son. He also declared publicly he needed “help” because of his “unbelief.” The Lord is worthy of perfect faith but He does not expect it. He knows our weaknesses. That is encouraging!

Powerful faith takes God at His word. Powerful faith also recognizes human weakness. Does the Bible say God can save sinners? Yes. As Christians, we must believe God can save sinners. Does the Bible say God has the ability to heal sickness and disease? Yes. The Bible does not teach God heals everyone but it does teach God can heal anyone He sovereignly chooses to heal. Therefore, Christians should have faith and believe in God’s ability to heal. Does the Bible teach God provides for His children? Yes. Christians must have faith in the ability of God to provide.

Verse 25-27

“When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.”

Jesus saw the anxious crowd so He quickly “rebuked the foul spirit,” and dismissed him from the boy. One word from Jesus, “I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him” and the evil spirit departed. The demon makes one final attempt to control the boy but Jesus has spoken.

The removal of the evil spirit and years of oppression left the young boy “as one dead.” The onlookers said, “He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up; and he arose.” What a beautiful picture of compassion and tenderness from our Lord in the midst of such a graphic display of evil.

Powerful Faith and Jesus’ Answer (Mark 9:28-29)

Verse 28

“And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out?”

After all the public display, emotions, and commotion of this event, Jesus is now “in the house” with His “disciples.” “His disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out?” They obviously had attempted to help this boy on their own. They had kind of hijacked faith and attempted to make it work through their own reasoning and power. They had sadly failed.

Give the disciples a little credit. They have just witnessed a father who had probably spent little if any time around Jesus express “faith” and they had been with Jesus for two years and they were lacking “faith.” You must admire these disciples for their question. They asked “Why?” It was a timely question. It was a needed question. Their impotence drew them back to the Lord who had called them and commissioned them. We should be asking the same question, “Why could not we cast him out?”

Question: Are you prepared to ask the Lord that question? Are you prepared for the answer God will give?

Verse 29

“And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.”

Simply stated, Jesus answered, “You know, the reason you could not cast the evil spirit out of this boy is because you were full of yourselves.” If faith is going to work it must come “by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.”

“Prayer” puts us in communication with the Lord and “fasting” empties us of ourselves. “Fasting” is refraining from eating food. In some cases, it even refers to refraining from drinking water. Our Lord is not prescribing a particular formula for “prayer” or “fasting” in this verse. He wants His disciples to know this boy’s problem could have been handled long before he came down from the mountain if they had depended upon the Lord and not been so full of themselves.

Conclusion

It is sad to live in a spiritual climate where biblical faith is being used for personal gain and financial profit. It is equally sad when biblical faith has been supplanted by reason among some professing Christians. People today

dismiss anything they cannot explain. There must be a proper balance between these two extremes. Thankfully there is.

The power of faith as demonstrated in the story of the demon possessed child is encouraging to every true believer. God's Word is the basis of our faith and truly "all things are possible to him that believeth." God's Word teaches us what we can believe. God Himself gives us faith to believe what He has said. When we do, there is power available to break the chains of sin, touch broken lives, and see the impossible occur.

May the Lord renew our hearts to genuine biblical faith. May we return to dependence upon the Lord through prayer and fasting. When we do, "all things will once again be possible to him that believeth."

Amen.