

A Faith that Does Not Fail

Mark 9:14 – 32

Proposition: A faith that does not fail begins with prayer. Through prayer we gain the assurance of God's mercy, power and will.

Application: Develop a faith that does not fail by cultivating the discipline of prayer.

I often pray when facing a problem too big for me to solve. If anyone in history faced problems too big to solve it was Abraham Lincoln. In one of his speeches, he said: *I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom, and that of all about me, seemed insufficient for the day.*” Being aware of his need Lincoln was compelled to pray.

A faith that does not fail begins with prayer, because through prayer we gain the assurance of God's mercy, and His power and of His will.

Jesus and His three men had just come off a spiritual high on a mountain top but as we see all was not well in the valley below. This account appears in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Mark's account is twice as long as the other two.

I. The Boy's Condition (9:14 – 18)

Disputing with the Disciples (9:14, 15): The three disciples must have been bubbling with joy as they went down the mountain. But when they arrived in the valley below, they came face to face with discord and darkness. Mountain top experiences are great. We need them to recharge our spiritual batteries, but we can't stay there. The Lord wants us *down here* in the valley to minister the Gospel to those in the grip of sin and Satan. Jesus and His three men stepped right into an intense debate. The subject of the dispute appears to be related to the failure of the nine disciples to drive out the demon from the young boy. The scribes seized upon this defeat as a reason to taunt and shame them before the crowd. The disciples' failure reflected badly on Jesus. Although the scribes opposed the Lord the crowd had a different response. When they *saw* Jesus, they were *amazed* at Him. They *ran* to Him and *welcomed* Him. Perhaps they thought Jesus could settle this dispute and drive this demon out of the boy.

People may look to the church for help and often see failure. But when they look to the Lord, for help they are amazed. People may run to the church hoping to find answers to their problems only to be let down but when they run to the Lord, they will not be let down (Rom 10:11). This sin laden world needs the church. We are the mouth, hands, and feet of Jesus. If we attempt to be His mouth, hands and feet in our own strength, according to our own wisdom, like the nine

Transformed by the Message and Miracles of the Messiah
A Series in the Gospel of Mark

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Parkland Baptist Church, 2024

disciples, we will fail; we may even bring reproach to the name of Jesus; and the world will be all too eager to put us down. We have authority to minister the Gospel; we have the gifts to serve; we have financial and human resources to make an impact, but if we lack the power of the Spirit our service for the Lord will fail and our witness for Him will fall short.

Defeat and Disappointment (9:16 – 18): While the scribes were debating and the nine disciples were defending, the demonized boy was wasting away. Think about how distraught the father felt hearing this dispute between the scribes and the disciples. He was not concerned with theological debate; he was consumed with grief over the state of his only son. But the presence of the Lord Jesus gave this father a glimmer of hope. When he went to Jesus, he approached Him in a posture of worship even calling Him Lord (Matt 17:14, 15a). The father described the torment his son had to endure. This demon seized the boy's life and threw him to the ground; caused intense seizures and foaming of the mouth. The demon would put the boy's body in a state of rigor mortis and try to get the boy to kill himself. This went on since childhood.

This text of Scripture teaches us some truths about demons. They are real not mythical. Even Jesus declared the reality of demons. The *modus operandi* of demons is to rob and ruin, to devour and destroy. Demons have a horrible plan for humans (John 10:10). We are helpless against demonic powers.

The father likely searched for Jesus but could not find Him. So, he did the next best “*thing*” – he went to the disciples. The saddest part of this passage is found in the phrase, *and they could not*. May this statement never be said about Parkland Baptist Church! Rather may it be said that the saints of Parkland Baptist Church are able to help because the Lord Jesus has given us the authority and ability to be His mouth, hands, and feet.

In the recent past, Jesus had given the twelve authority and power to drive out demons (Luke 9:1). No doubt the failure of the nine disciples left the father disappointed and perhaps disillusioned. Christians called by God to serve are also equipped by God to serve. So why could the nine disciples not set this young boy free? We will talk about why in a bit. Suffice it to say, the church has a God-given authority to be the mouth, hands and feet of Jesus. But it takes more than authority it requires the power of the Holy Spirit. The power we exert depends on the power we possess. If we seek to be servants of the Gospel in our own flesh, we will fail; the Lord will be grieved; and we will give cause for unbelievers to mock us. It takes both God's authority and His power to defeat sin and satan.

Unbelief was why the nine disciples failed. They could not perform this miracle because their faith was lacking.

II. The Father's Concern (9:19 – 24)

Disbelieving Generation (9:19 – 22a): An *unbelieving generation* refers to *the crowd, the scribes, the disciples* and even *the father*. That generation had seen signs and wonders and still they remained doubtful. And Jesus was grieved. The father's faith was likely shattered because of the lack of faith of the disciples. When Jesus said *bring him to me* that must have been music to the father's ears.

The kingdom of satan flees at the presence of the kingdom of God. Demons have no choice but to obey the Lord.

Do Something, Please! (9:22b, 23): *If you can?* Does this not describe the times in which we live? The father believed that Jesus had mercy, but did He have power? In effect he was saying *Your disciples could not heal my son. This was way out of their league. Maybe this case is too hard for you?* This was the cry of a disappointed, disillusioned, and defeated man. His faith was shattered to the core. I will paraphrase Jesus' response: *"What do you mean if I can? I created the cosmos! Of course I can!* The One who created a billion galaxies, each filled with a billion stars, is not daunted by demons. The question is not whether Jesus can, the question is whether we believe He can (Heb 11:1, 6). It is not a matter of how big our faith is, it is how big our God is! A little faith in a great God is all that is needed (Matt 17:20b).

A faith that does not fail, knows that God is *merciful*; knows that He is all *powerful*; and knows that it is God's *will* to act.

Deliver Me from Doubt (9:24): When seeking God's help, we often look to Him during a time of illness or when searching for a job or seeking guidance. But how often do we seek His help when our faith is found wanting? This father may have left home with some faith but due to the failure of the nine disciples, his faith was shattered. Jesus had to rebuild his shattered faith before He could free his son of demons. The dad uttered one of the best prayers in Scripture – *help my unbelief*. Give me assurance of Your mercy. Give me assurance of Your power. Give me the assurance of Your will (2 Cor 12:9a). Our weakness shows God's power more perfectly than our strength. It is not the *strength* of our faith that matters, what matters is the *subject* of our faith. Is the Lord Jesus the *subject* of your faith? If not ask the Lord to *help your unbelief*.

The father asked for help for his faith and received help for his son! Jesus rewarded his faith by freeing his son.

III. The Lord's Command (9:25 – 27)

Delivered from Demons (9:25 – 27): The crowd knew something big was about to happen, so they hurried to see the event. But Jesus does not perform miracles for curious crowds and so, He acted quickly. Jesus cast out the unclean spirit and placed a *no trespass* sign over the boy's soul.

Never again will this be a problem for the boy (Matt 12:43 – 45). Jesus is in the lifting-up business. He lifts us out of our despair and gives us life.

Failure in a venture should cause us to ask *where did I go wrong?*

IV. The Disciples Question (9:28 – 32)

Debriefing (9:28, 29): The nine disciples were rightly concerned about their very public failure. So, Jesus and His 12 men withdrew to debrief in the privacy of a home. Rather than scold them for their failure the Lord gently gave two reasons for their failure: lack of prayer and lack of faith (Matt 17:19, 20a). Maybe the nine disciples assumed the authority the Lord had given them was enough to free the boy from the demon. They lacked power because they lacked prayer. Prayer is to converse with the Lord; prayer connects us to God; prayer lays hold of God's authority and ability. The nine disciples tried to exercise God's authority without first seeking the Lord in prayer. *A faith that prays is a faith that does not fail.* The battle for the world is fought and won on our knees.

As born-again Christians we are engaged in a spiritual battle. We cannot not wage this war with our own resources; we wage this war with the divine weapons of prayer and faith. The Lord Jesus has given PBC His authority and power to be ministers of the Gospel. Our Gospel ministry is effective only if it is exercised in faith that has been cultivated in prayer.

The Christian life is full of successes and failures; it is full of high points and low points. No matter what we face in life, we need a faith that does not fail. A faith that does not fail begins with prayer – it starts with communion with the Lord. Out of that communion we gain the knowledge of His mercy. Out of our communion with the Lord we gain the assurance that He is able. Out of our communion with the Jesus we gain the assurance that it is His will to do what we ask.