



Jesus is Lord in the Valley

November 26, 2023

Mark 9:14-29

Clint Pressley

¹⁴ And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. ¹⁵ And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. ¹⁶ And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" ¹⁷ And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. ¹⁸ And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able." ¹⁹ And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me." ²⁰ And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. ²¹ And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. ²² And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." ²³ And Jesus said to him, "'If you can!' All things are possible for one who believes." ²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" ²⁵ And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." ²⁶ And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he

arose. ²⁸ And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” ²⁹ And he said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”

(Pastor prays)

Thanksgiving is an unusual holiday. Thanksgiving is an unusually Christian holiday because of the very virtue of the name, *Thanksgiving*. You have to have someone to give thanks to, and that, presumptuously, is God.

Thanksgiving is an unusual holiday because it falls right in the middle of the week every year, right? It's on a Thursday and it upsets the weekly routine. Do you like routine? Many of us had Wednesday off, and then you have Thursday, and then you have Friday, and you lose track of what day it is. Thanksgiving is an unusual day when you are intentionally overeating to the degree that many of you are taking pictures of what you are overeating and putting them on social media. Sort of saying, “Look how I'm overeating.” When the holiday is over, we come down off that joyful mountain of food. We come down off the mountain and we go back to work or we go back to school—we go back to life. That's just what we see happening in this passage. The sons of thunder, James and John, along with Peter, had followed Jesus up the mountain, and they're on the mountain top they witnessed the glorious revelation of the exalted Jesus. We know it as the Transfiguration. Basically that word means He was changed in front of them. And now they're coming down, and this is where we pick up the story. They make this long walk down the mountain and they're talking about what happened on the mountain. But when they get down to the bottom of the mountain, it's back to the grind. It's back to the arguing, it's back to the crowds, it's back to the accusers, it's back to the scribes. It's back to the demand and it's back to the demon and it's back to the people; back to all the need. It's not unlike what many of you will go back to. You wouldn't choose the valley you're in. You would not have chosen it, but here you are. And I think this story gives us some sobering hope on how we can live in the valley with joy. I'll say it like this. What does this passage point to?

Jesus is Lord, Especially in the Valley

Let's go back to the story like we've been doing for the last several months. This story is different than other stories Mark tells. Matthew and Luke have the same story as the Synoptic Gospels, but Mark does something different. Mark takes the story and tells it in a longer fashion than any of the other writers do. In fact, the way he has written it here—even with the economy of his language—Mark gives twice the number of words and information and detail than the other Gospel writers do. That's why I think it's important for you and I to keep our head down in the story, to stay in it. It's not so important what I say today by way of the sermon, it's important what you see in God's Word. Join me there as we walk through it.

In verse 14, when James, John, Peter, and Jesus came to the other nine disciples that had been left at the bottom of the mountain, they saw that the disciples were not by themselves, but there's a crowd that's gathering around. There's something happening and there's lots of activity. When they get closer to the crowd they see some of the scribes there that had come from Jerusalem. The scribes are the ones that make sure everybody follows the law. They've written the Torah, and they are going to be the accusers. They are there getting evidence. There's something that has happened that has created an argument in verse 14. The scribes are arguing with the nine disciples, and Mark takes our attention off that and, in verse 14, he says, "Okay, what happened?" When the crowds saw Jesus, they were greatly amazed. Some have said that Jesus coming down off the Mount of Transfiguration was similar to Moses coming down from Mount Sinai with his face glowing. I think that's really far stretched. I think it was just the presence of Jesus that amazed the people. So, in verse 14, they are amazed and they greet Him. And Jesus, always taking care of His own, asked them, "What are you arguing about?" I think He's talking to the scribes. What are they arguing about? Here's what we don't know. We're going to find out in just a moment. The stories are going to open up for us, but let me telegraph it a little bit. There's a man who has brought his son who is possessed by a demon. He

brought that little boy to be healed by Jesus, but Jesus wasn't there. The disciples, who had been given the power to cast out demons in Mark chapter six, were unable to cast this one out, and now the scribes were using that to provoke the crowd saying that they were fake. They're having an argument.

Now in verse 17, center stage comes to the dad and his son. Someone from the crowd answered Jesus, "Teacher." Remember, Peter had called Him *Rabbi* up on the mountain. But this person says, *Teacher, I brought my son to you but you were gone. I brought my son to you for he has a spirit that makes him mute. Not only that, whenever it seizes him, it throws him down and he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth.* Can you imagine how terrible that is? You might call it an epileptic seizure, except that it is a demon that's given it to him. It's to the degree that the demon is throwing him on the ground, and he can't speak and, you're gonna find out in a minute, he can't hear. The man says, *I brought my son to your disciples looking for you. I thought they could do it but they were not able to.* Now in verse 19, Jesus is exasperated. He's talking to His disciples when He answers, *O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.* In verse 20, the demon cannot stand the holiness of Jesus, so immediately it convulses the boy. The boy is shaking uncontrollably and falls on the ground and he's rolling around, foaming at the mouth. If you take the other verses, you see he's grinding his teeth and he's rigid. All of this is happening and listen to the compassion of Jesus as He turns to the boy's father. In verse 21 Jesus asks him, *How long has this been going on?* The father says, *And he said, "From childhood."²² And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him.* We can't do anything. We can't go anywhere. We don't know when it's going to happen. We could be in a gathering and we can't go to the synagogue. We can't be with our family. It's often that it happens and the demon casts him into the fire when his mom is cooking. The devil gets him and throws him in the fire. Or, if we're walking by the sea of Galilee or on the River Jordan, he'll go way out in the water and I'll have to wade out and get him back. It's more than we can bear, It's trying to destroy his body. What does Satan do? He seeks to kill, to destroy. He's probably around looking for someone to devour. So the father says in verse 22, *...but if you can do anything, have compassion*

on us and help us. He is saying that because Jesus' disciples couldn't help them, his faith was shaken. Now, in verse 23, I don't think this is an arrogant statement because Jesus is not arrogant; He's humble and kind. I think it's a gentle rebuke. I think He's bringing this father's faith back. Look at verses 23-24: *And Jesus said to him, If you can! All things are possible for one who believes. Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, I believe; help my unbelief!* In verse 25, the crowd sees something going on over there, and they start coming toward Jesus. Jesus does not have any desire to make a spectacle out of people's lives. He sees the crowd coming and He knows if they see this they are going to want to try to make Him king. So in verse 25, He goes ahead and rebukes the demon. This rebuke is unlike any other rebuke in the entire Bible. You see, out of the mouth of Jesus, He commands the unclean spirit to come out, and He adds an addendum: *Come out and don't ever come back.* Don't you want to say that? Come out and don't ever come back. Jesus gives this confidence to the father. He rebuked that demon out of the boy and says don't ever come back, and that's what happens in verse 26. There's this last convulsing and crying and Satan understands his time is limited. And as the time grows nearer, he will become more evil and more hateful. So he's got to come out, and he has one last terrible episode. It's so terrible that, in this passage, the boy is like a corpse. Some people are standing around and thinking he's dead. And in verse 27, look at the structure: *But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.* Mark then backs us away and, in verses 28-29, there is sort of an epilogue to the story. If you're reading a book, at the end of the book you have some explanation filling in some gaps. So here's the lesson in verse 28. When they entered the house—we don't know whose house it is, we were not told. Mark gave us all these details, but then he didn't tell us whose house it is. But when he entered the house, His disciples asked Him privately why they couldn't cast out the demon. They received the power to do that. They even celebrated the power to cast demons out in Mark chapter six. Why not this time? What happened? And verse 29 is the lesson. This is where all this has been going. Here is the lesson, which is kind of a side note. And Jesus says, "This kind"—so it would indicate there are different kinds of demons. Like if there's an archangel, then that's the ruling angel and the other angels would be under him. So this is an

especially evil demon. How do you combat it? Verse 29 says this kind only comes out with prayer.

So now that we've got the story, let's go back and see what the principles are. What are some things that we can walk out of here with today based on this story? What does this teach us? I would like to offer up a couple of them. Here's the first one, number one:

It's only going to get more confusing

The world we live in is only going to get more confusing. When you read verses 14-16, you see they come down off this great retreat and go down into this valley. And look at the characters that are there. You have the three disciples that were with Jesus. You have the nine disciples that were left. You have the scribes that are making these accusations, and you have the crowd of spectators. You have a father, and presumably a mother, who are worried about their son. You have a boy who is possessed by a demon. He can't speak. He can't hear. His body is being tortured. You have Satan seeking to destroy. When you read this, you have nothing but chaos. And that's what we walk into. It feels like a chaotic world. What are you gonna do? There are a couple of things that I think are going to be necessary.

The first one is for you and me to find a way to get closer to Christ. Closer to Christ. If you're going to actually call yourself a Christian, let's find the right avenues to make sure you are developing as a man of God or a woman of God, a young man of God, a young woman of God. What are you doing so that you are growing strong in your faith?

The other thing is to trust the gospel. We say we believe the gospel. This is that Jesus lived perfectly, died on the cross, God raised Him from the dead, and He ascended into Heaven. What does that do for you.? It's got to be more than just you raising your hand. It's even got to be more than getting baptized, as glorious as it is to follow through with baptism and what it symbolizes. It is the transformative power of the gospel. We have to stake our

lives on the gospel. Something else about how you plan to grow. We've got five or six Sundays left in this year, then we come into 2024. I think, in this day and time, it is important for Christians to make a plan on how you are going to develop as a woman of God or a man of God in this coming year. Create a plan for how you are going to press yourself into disciplines, a plan to read the Bible. Plan what books you're going to read, how you're going to grow theologically, how you're going to grow spiritually, how you're going to grow doctrinally.

I'll give you something else. It's good for us to get serious about our own sin. You can see everybody else's. That's much more fun. You can point to those, but what about your own sin? What are the things that you are tripped up by? Where are you struggling? What are you not getting victory over? What's keeping you from developing as a believer and why? Because it's only going to get worse. I'm gonna give something else that I think you can find out here. Number two:

It's only going to get more evil

I mean that's what we are introduced to here in verses 17 and 18. This boy, although his ailment looks like epilepsy when you read it, you find what it really is is that he is possessed by a demon. And you get to verses 21 and 22 and you see that this demon is seeking to hurt the boy. This is not just epilepsy, this is something else. His teeth grind, his muscles twitch, he foams at the mouth, he's thrown into the fire, he's thrown in the water. The demon's desire is to hurt. So what do we do with that?

One of the things that I would like to just sort of reintroduce is that we shouldn't mythologize Satan. I think, in this day and time, we have in our modern minds pressed aside the actual realness of Satan. That evil is not just a force, it is a person. And that person's desire, according to the Bible, is to kill and to destroy. He's walking around looking for someone to devour, and he had this boy. I think we need to demythologize him.

I think we need to be more discerning as Christians. I think we need to be more discerning. If you're a parent, I think you need to be more discerning. If

you are a young man or woman, I want you to think more clearly than you do right now. Be discerning what you let in with your eyes, what you read, what you watch, who you are with, and what you listen to. Be discerning about those videos on *TikTok*. I think that is a wormhole for Satan to get in. I think Christians ought to be more discerning.

There's something else I think we need to be more aware of and that is the image of God. I think you should be more aware of the image of God. When I say the image of God, I mean His image in you. It's good for you to be reminded that you are created in the image of God. That means you have worth and dignity and people are to respect you because of that. Whether you're a Christian or not, you should know that's who you are, created in the image of God. And not only that, we look at other people. They are created in the image of God.

Now, the gospel tells us the image of God has been disfigured by sin, and that sin has separated us from God. The gospel says that God has come to rescue us through Christ, who lived perfectly. There's no other human who could have died on the cross to take the wrath away. God raised Him from the dead, and if you trust that He did that on your behalf, you are saved. It's true. That's how you're saved.

But the image of God is in everyone. This is why we have such disdain for any sort of mutilation of the body. This is where we break down with the transgender movement. Because any movement that hurts the body is satanic. You see, Satan's desire here was not just to hurt that boy's mind and his heart, but also his body. So we say, there's a better way. There's a God who created you in His image, and what He created was good. And that image is restored through faith in Christ. It's good for us to be more aware of the image of God in us. Why? Because it's only going to get more evil. Let me show you a third consideration. Number three:

It's only going to get more broken

This passage is filled with brokenness. From the very beginning, when they come down off the mountain and go down into the valley where those nine disciples are there with a crowd. There are broken people. In verse 15, we meet the scribes. Those scribes are broken in their legalism because they think they're doing so good. That's broken. You rely on yourself and you think you're a pretty good person, but that's brokenness. We get to verses 18 and 19 and we meet the 9 disciples. They're broken because their faith is broken. They tried to heal this boy, but they couldn't do it.

They're broken. The subject of the entire story is the father and his son—presumably his wife, as well—and that family is broken. This boy that they love, all his life he can't hear, he can't speak. This demon is trying to kill him. Can you imagine living like that?

Or the little boy, think about the boy. He can't communicate, he can't hear, he can't talk. He's being physically tortured. And this story is here to show us this brokenness. Jesus comes into this brokenness to show us the sufficiency of the gospel. The conversation that goes on when the father says *if you can* help us, and when Jesus says *if I can*, as if to say there's unlimited power here. It's what we've been singing all morning. Anything is possible. This story reminds us of the sufficiency of the gospel. When I say sufficiency, I mean it has the power to save, the power to save you, the power to forgive you. The power to restore you. The power to rebuild your life. The power to heal you. It's the power of the gospel, the power to reconcile family members, to reconcile you to God. It has the power to sustain you. This story is reminding us of the great power of Jesus. Why? Because we live in a world that's only going to get more broken. Let me give you a fourth consideration. Number four:

It's all a test of faith

Everything is a test of faith. When you look at the disciples, when the man brings his son to the disciples, he's looking for Jesus. Jesus is not there, and the disciples can't cast out the demon. It is a test of their faith. They failed the

test, and that man, who thought Jesus could heal, is asking if He can. He thought Jesus could but the disciples couldn't. So now he's not sure. By the way, just as an aside, how we respond in faith reflects on our King. How we respond to the crisis reflects on the King.

But the whole point of this is not the *strength* of faith. The whole point is the *object* of faith. What is the object of faith? Let me show it to you in verses 22 and 23. Here we have one of the most powerful and poignant exchanges between Jesus and another person in the entire New Testament. Let me show it to you in verses 22-24: *And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. And Jesus said to him, If you can! All things are possible for one who believes. Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, I believe; help my unbelief!* Let's go through the interchange. "If you can," the man says. And Jesus says, "'If I can.' What do you mean?" If God has the power to do anything, it's not the amount of faith that is so important. Please don't go around saying, "If you just have enough faith." That's putting all the weight on you. That is a works-based salvation. If you can just come up with enough faith. It is not the amount of faith that is so important, it is the object of faith. Here's what it means. The Bible teaches that if you have faith like a mustard seed, so small, that faith, like a mustard seed, moves mountains. Not because that faith is so big. No. It's because that faith is in the sovereign Lord who can do anything. That's why faith is strong. And the man's response to Jesus in verse 24 is one of my most favorite responses. It's, at the same time, a statement and a request. So the statement is, "I believe." This needs to be our prayer, *I believe*. Then the request, *help my unbelief*. We should write that down somewhere. That, humanly speaking, we are weak, and only by the power of God will we have sufficient faith to ask God to do what is unlimited. Faith does not put a limit on what God can do. So what have we learned so far? It's only going to get worse and more confusing. It's only going to get more evil. It's only going to get more broken. All of this is a test of faith. Let's see if we can bring it back up to something helpful and hopeful. The two final points. First, number five:

It's all a set-up for victory

Let's go to the miracle in verses 25-27. That sounds a little bit like a prosperity preacher, but I don't mean for it to. It's all a setup for this victorious picture of God's saving. Let me show the miracle in verses 25-27: *And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.'* And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, 'He is dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. It's a foreshadowing. It's what God did for us in Christ when He saved us. It's a foreshadowing of what Jesus will do when He finally breaks Satan's power. In an irreversible sense of what He does through His life and death and resurrection. Here is a foreshadowing of the gospel. This is how we are saved; when God reaches down in Christ, pulls us up from the dead, and saves us through what Jesus has done on the cross. It's a setup for victory.

I'll give you one last epilogue. What's the back story? What's the end? Here is the sixth point. It's a simple reminder. Number six:

It's a reminder that you are not praying enough

The lesson is at the very end of the epilogue. So the story ends in verses 28-29. Once the boy is healed—and presumably the family goes off, the crowds disperse—that evening, they are in somebody's house and they have a private session. The disciples finally ask in verse 28, *Why couldn't we do it?* And Jesus tells them in verse 29 that this kind cannot be cast out except by prayer. What is prayer? Prayer is the full reliance on the power of God. Prayer is the full reliance on the unlimited power of God. What are the four steps of prayer? The first one is believing that He is able, believing that God is able. The second step is asking God to move. We ask God to do something on behalf of someone else or for ourselves. A good rule of thumb to help you ask God is, what if God only gave you the things that you asked for? Learn to ask. The

third step in praying is to trust Him. He's asking you to trust. Trust that a good and sovereign God will do everything well, and He will do everything according to His perfect will and plan and timing. And the fourth step in prayer that's helped me is to accept that all of the yes's and amens find their answer in Christ. Christ is my portion. Christ is my hope. Christ is my strength and joy, and Christ is the holder of my future. Christ is the cleanser of my past. You can start this week knowing that Jesus is Lord, especially in the valley.

(Pastor prays)