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Sermon Notes

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Jesus Wields the Sharp Sword of Rebuke

Mark 9:14-32

One of the most remarkable pictures of Jesus is in Revelation 1, where the beloved Apostle John saw the glorified Son of God with eyes of blazing fire, feet of burnished bronze, and **with a sharp, double-edged sword coming out of his mouth**.

Jesus is the Great Physician... the sovereign healer of all the diseases that beset the human race, both body and soul. Yet, in this amazing account, we find Jesus the healer using a sharp double-edged sword from his mouth... REBUKE... sharp, incisive words, **like a double-edged sword**, swung powerfully at his wicked enemy – a vicious demon, to destroy his hold over a boy; but also **like a gleaming scalpel**, sharply to cut out the tumor of unbelief in the souls of his followers.

Jesus does not coddle unbelief... but if we admit we can say with the man in the account, "I DO believe! Help me in my unbelief!", if we are willing to lie under the sharp double-edged scalpel of his rebukes, we may also be healed our unbelief.

I. Overview: One Main Goal, Three Themes, and a Perfect Narrative

A. A Remarkable Account Serves One Main Goal

1. This is not just another exorcism and healing account
2. It has various remarkable elements worthy of our careful study
3. In this account Jesus confronts two basic enemies... a vicious **demon** and varying levels of **unbelief** on the parts of people

4. The central purpose of all four Gospels is the same... to bring us to faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God

- a. The theme of Mark's Gospel established at beginning and end

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Mark 15:39 the centurion... said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

- b. As Peter said

Matthew 16:16 "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

- c. So also the purpose of John's Gospel

John 20:31 These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

5. So every account in every Gospel is going to serve this one main goal... to produce faith in Jesus Christ

- a. First, it will present the **credentials** of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God... his power, his nature, his compassion and love and unique identity as the God-Man

- b. Second, it will address us as the readers to persuade us to **believe** in him... to move from spiritual blindness to sight

- c. And the eyesight of the soul is FAITH

6. So, the Gospels tend to show varying levels of response to Jesus, **both** of marvelous **faith** in him but also of **unbelief**

7. The Gospels exemplify unbelief so we can be rebuked from unbelief to faith once we have enough evidence to believe in Jesus

B. This Account: Three Themes... the demon, the faith of the people, the glory of Christ

1. **Theme #1:** The **demon**, its vicious nature and its chronic reign of terror over a boy and his loving father

2. **Theme #2:** The **faith** of the people surrounding this case... actually their varying levels of **unbelief**

- a. There is no person there whose faith is exemplary; rather there are varying levels of unbelief
 - b. First, the crowd... the group whose faith Jesus is trying to win; their spiritual condition is not described in this account, but they are mentioned twice: at the beginning, right before the healing
 - c. Second, Jesus' enemies, the teachers of the law who were arguing with the disciples; these teachers of the law were dogging Jesus' every step, hounding him, opposing him, saying his miracles were done by Beelzebub, the Prince of Darkness
 - d. Third, Jesus' nine apostles who he'd left behind when he took Peter, James, and John up the Mount of Transfiguration; Jesus is exasperated with them, as we shall see and the account
 - e. Fourth, the father of the boy... who has enough faith to be there for the healing, but whose faith has been severely wounded by the faithlessness of the disciples
3. **Theme #3: The glory of Christ**... his character, his words, his actions... his response to unbelief (rebuking it to heal it), his compassion on the father and the boy, his infinite power especially in his claiming omnipotence (ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE), and his display of that power by rebuking the demon and effortlessly driving it out, the wisdom of Christ in dealing with the apostles' faithlessness and prayerlessness; finally Christ's glory predicted in his death on the cross and his mighty resurrection victory
4. These three themes, the vicious **demon**, the **people** and their varying levels of **unbelief**, and the **glory of Christ** are perfectly **WOVEN TOGETHER** in a tapestry of narrative that I want to honor in its cohesive approach before I unravel it to study its individual strands

C. Walking Through the Perfect Narrative in Order

- 1. The Mountaintop Experience is OVER! Jesus comes down off the mount of transfiguration with Peter, James, and John; time to get back to work, and for Jesus to keep walking the road to the cross

2. Jesus sees the nine apostles he left behind arguing with the teachers of the law while the crowd listened to the argument
3. The crowd sees Jesus and are said to be “overwhelmed with wonder”... why? Not sure... but it’s like they have been desperately searching for Jesus and not finding him; now they see him and run to him
4. Jesus asks the Apostles ***“What were you arguing with them about?”***
5. A father tells the first part of his tragic story:

Mark 9:17-18 "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."

6. The demon’s overpowering viciousness is first opened up here; more on that in a moment
7. But Jesus doesn’t focus on that enemy (the demon) but on a far more significant enemy: UNBELIEF!!
8. Why is unbelief his greatest concern? Because everything Jesus does is to produce faith in the hearts of people, because he knows sinners will only be SAVED BY FAITH

Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith

9. So Jesus reacts with a powerful rebuke concerning his Apostles who failed to drive out the demon and thus severely wounded the faith of this man, as well as the onlooking crowd

Mark 9:19 "O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?"

10. This may be the sharpest rebuke Jesus ever gave to his Apostles! We’ll talk more about it in a moment
11. Then Jesus ordered, ***“Bring the boy to me!”***

12. Jesus is absolutely certain what he will do with this demon; that is no problem at all
13. They brought the demon-possessed boy to Jesus, and immediately the demon threw the boy down on the ground in a convulsion; he is dominating this tragic boy and his helpless grieving father; the boy rolls around on the ground, foaming at the mouth
14. Jesus asked for the history... "How long has he been like this?" Fascinating, because Jesus doesn't need any patient to give his history... Jesus already knows everything, and doesn't need information to heal anybody; but this is so that we might get a sense of the magnitude of emotion behind the torment the demon has been putting them through
15. The father answers, "From childhood"... Meaning, this has been going on FOR YEARS and YEARS!! I can scarcely imagine!
16. Then he adds that the demon has OFTEN thrown the boy into the fire or water to kill him!
17. Then the father exposes his own level of unbelief:

Mark 9:22 "But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

18. See how much this poor father's faith has been wounded by the failure in faith of the Apostles! He came expecting that Jesus could heal him; now he's not so sure!
19. Jesus then uses a gentler rebuke with this man's answer, coupled with an assertion of his power as the basis of increased faith:

Mark 9:23 "'If you can'?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."

20. Basically, "Don't you know who I am?"
21. Then the man gives his timeless answer, which I will seize on as the point of the entire passage for us Christians:

Mark 9:24 "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

22. Jesus then sees the crowd coming together, running to the scene ... from that crowd Jesus seeks to gather his sheep through faith; it is for their sake and the countless millions crowding around this scene over the centuries as we read this account in the Gospel of Mark... for that crowd, Jesus does this mighty miracle

Mark 9:25 he rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

23. The latter part of that command is remarkable and, I believe, unique in all the Gospels... that particular demon is forbidden from ever entering this boy again! That boy and his father have suffered that particular agony enough

24. This account ends with the disciples asking Jesus privately why they had failed to drive it out; it clearly implies they TRIED and FAILED

25. Remember that Jesus had specifically given these Twelve Apostles power over demons, and they had earlier been successful in driving out many demons

Mark 3:14-15 He appointed twelve-- designating them apostles--that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and to have authority to drive out demons.

Mark 6:13 They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

26. Jesus tells them **"This kind can only come out by prayer"**... meaning they tried to drive out the demon without God's aid in prayer; prayerlessness exposed their self-reliance, as though their power to drive out demons resided within themselves, their talents

27. The final part involves Jesus once more predicting his death and resurrection

Okay... we have now honored the text in the order in which the Holy Spirit gave it; let's pull out the themes individually and see how they glorify Christ and bring us from unbelief to faith

II. Jesus Rebukes a Vicious Demon

A. The Demon Is Stunningly Vicious

1. This gives an insight into the terrible wickedness of Satan and his dark kingdom
2. Jesus said that Satan is the thief that comes to steal, kill, and destroy
3. This demon was constantly seeking to kill this poor boy, but it also stole from him his hearing and speech; Jesus called him a “deaf and mute spirit”... the father said it had robbed him of speech, but we learn also of hearing
4. Later in the text, we get an insight into TYPES of demons

Jesus said ... *Mark 9:29 “This kind can only come out by prayer”*

- a. Just as there are levels of holy angels, such as “Archangels” and angels, so there are levels of demons, such as in this verse:

Ephesians 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

- b. This demon focused like a specialty on the functions of hearing and speaking... “you deaf and mute spirit” Jesus called him; it may well be that demons are responsible for specific diseases
5. Ponder what life was like as this demon had **often** sought to kill him by throwing him into the fire or the water
6. What could it have been like to be this boy’s father??
7. You never know when the next attack it going to come!
8. How many times did he have to dive into the water to pull out his demon-possessed boy who might be either rigid or thrashing around and fighting him?

9. How many times did he see him fall into a fire and his clothes ignite? The father had to roll him on the ground or beat him with a carpet to put out the flames
10. And WHEN did these attacks happen? Middle of the night? During the synagogue services? At a family meal?
11. Furthermore, the father says this has been going on SINCE HE WAS A BOY! That implies YEARS of this abuse!
12. As a father of five children, I can scarcely relate these details without tears stinging my eyes
13. The demon is vastly more powerful than the boy, or the father, or any of the teachers of the law who were arguing with the Apostles for not driving him out
14. This demon is a tyrant, a bully, kicking this helpless boy around when he's laying prostrate on the ground

B. By Contrast, See Jesus' Compassion and Power

Mk 9:22 But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.

1. The father asks Jesus for COMPASSION... not knowing that Jesus is compassion personified
2. He also doesn't understand Jesus' omnipotence

Mark 9:23 "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."

3. Jesus is infinitely above the demon in power... all the demons were terrified of Jesus, as we've noted in the past
4. And Jesus is totally different than the demon... the demon has absolutely no mercy, no pity, no compassion; but Jesus' heart is deeply moved and tender toward this boy and his father

C. A Display of Power in the Rebuke

1. Jesus rebukes the demon...

Mark 9:25 "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

2. Within the rebuke is the foretaste of the final sentence of future eternal death this demon will someday experience

Matthew 25:41 "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels"

3. The demon makes the boy thrash around one more time, foaming at the mouth; then when Jesus drives him out, he leaves the boy completely still, as if he's dead

Mark 9:26-27 The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead."²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

4. The demon's last temper tantrum, the last time assaulting the boy reminds me of this statement about Satan himself:

Revelation 12:12 "He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

5. BUT let's celebrate Jesus' effortless power over demons again!
6. And note this unique element... this particular demon is forbidden from ever entering this boy again
7. Amazing, because in another place, Jesus actually said it is demons' regular habit to return to the same person/house/nation when driven out

Matthew 12:43-45 "When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. ⁴⁴ Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation."

8. But in this particular case, Jesus is protecting this boy and his exhausted father from ever experiencing this again

9. God the Father will enforce this judgment from his Son; this is a permanent restraining order on this demon; like one of those ankle monitors worn by criminal out on probation so the authorities can track their activities
10. This is a glimpse into the overall restraint God puts on Satan and demons. Satan complained of a HEDGE that God had put around Job and all his possessions... that is a restraint, limiting Satan's activity and access

III. Jesus Rebukes Various Levels of Unbelief

A. No One Has Exemplary Faith in this Account

1. Often, Jesus will comment on people's faith... like the Syro-Phoenician woman's faith... "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted!" Or the Roman centurion, of whom Jesus said, "I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith!"
2. Here, no one's faith is put on display
3. Rather, everyone needs some help

B. The Crowd... They are the harvest field; Jesus is seeking to win them to faith by his works

C. The Teachers of the Law: enemies who have decided that Jesus drives out demons by Beelzebub

1. They were arguing with the Apostles at the beginning of the account... almost certainly making much of their failure as clear proof that Jesus was a fraud

D. The Apostles

1. They are the focus of the sharpest rebuke he ever gave his followers
2. He said

Mark 9:19 "O unbelieving generation,"

Stunningly, Matthew and Luke gives the fuller statement:

Matthew 17:17 "O unbelieving and perverse generation,"

3. The first word: unbelieving or faithless
4. Jesus is not claiming that they have no faith; but rather that they are ACTING as if they have no faith

In Luke's account of the stilling of the storm, the disciples cried out

Luke 8:24-25 Master, Master, we're going to drown!" He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. ²⁵ "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples.

5. Their unbelief was specifically in that Jesus had GIVEN THEM POWER to drive out demons, and they HAD driven out demons, but they FAILED TO PRAY this time... meaning they were displaying a faithless SELF-RELIANCE

Mark 9:28-29 After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" ²⁹ He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."

6. [NOW I know the KJV adds "and fasting," but this was almost certainly a later addition by some zealous monk that was copying the Gospel of Mark and felt that an additional layer of piety was what was lacking. But it makes no sense... a demon-possessed boy cannot wait for them to put in some time fasting]
7. The real issue is they RELIED ON THEMSELVES not on God, and God would not send the power of the Spirit to back up their words
8. God effectively threw them under the bus and was willing for Jesus' reputation to take a hit temporarily because of their failing
9. Jesus made it plain:

John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches... apart from me you can do nothing.

10. Prayerless may be the single clearest display of faithless self-reliance in the Christian life

E. The Boy's Father

1. The man had enough faith to bring the boy to Jesus initially
2. That's why he was there to begin with
3. But the Apostles' faithless display had rocked his faith in Jesus
4. By this time, he's not so sure ANYONE can help him

Mark 9:22 if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

5. Jesus rebukes this by simply asserting the absolute power of God

Mark 9:23 "'If you can'?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."

Job said to God:

Job 42:2 "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted."

This is the doctrine of OMNIPOTENCE

6. Jesus' clear implication is that he himself can do anything...
because the man was not questioning God's power but Jesus'!
7. But Jesus is the direct instrument of God to work wonders in this world; there is literally nothing Jesus cannot do!
8. Note how he ties it to faith... "Everything is possible FOR HIM WHO BELIEVES!"
9. Jesus is directly feeding the man's faith with truth and challenging him to accept it
10. The father's timeless statement

Mark 9:24 "I do believe; help my unbelief!"

11. This is the point for all of us who are already Christians... just like the Apostles
12. Initial faith in Christ is in our hearts but we still act in unbelief

13. Jesus wants us to take the statement of his absolute power and apply it to every situation we will ever face in life
14. He then fed the man's faith not just with words but with the decisive action of effortlessly driving out the demon

IV. Jesus Again Predicts His Death and Resurrection

Mark 9:30-32 They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, ³¹ because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "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." ³² But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

A. I Am Adding this On

1. This is the next section... it is not related to the healing account
2. BUT I don't want to preach a whole sermon on this one paragraph

B. Yet it does fit

1. Jesus is preparing his disciples who already do believe in him for the greatest trial their faith will ever endure
2. Seeing Jesus betrayed by one of them, arrested, tortured, killed will rock their faith to its foundation
3. So effectively, Jesus is extending the father's statement to them in this greatest matter: "Lord we DO believe! Help us overcome our unbelief when we see you bleeding out on the cross!"
4. Being warned ahead of time will help their faith survive

V. Timeless Lessons

A. Come to Jesus!

1. Jesus does everything, all his miracles, to destroy the works of the devil and free his captives
2. These miracles are written for a reason

John 20:31 These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

3. What more evidence do you need that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world?
4. The scripture's account of Christ's identity as the Son of God, of his sinless life, of his astonishing power, of his tender mercies and compassion, of his wise teachings, of his atoning death on the cross and his mighty resurrection from the dead is everything you need for FAITH
5. And it is BY FAITH IN CHRIST ALONE that sins are forgiven

B. Christians... Lay Under Jesus' Sharp Scalpel

1. Let his rebukes rest on you
2. Haven't we displayed faithlessness in our walks with Jesus?
3. Haven't we denied him by our sins? Haven't we displayed faithless self-reliance through prayerlessness?
4. Let Jesus' sharp rebuke, "O unbelieving and perverse generation! How long shall I put up with you?" jar you to deep repentance
5. Our faithlessness taxes his patience... when he says "How long shall I put up with you?"
6. **Ask the Lord to expose patterns of PRAYERLESSNESS in your life; no, he is not calling us to apostolic power of exorcisms; but how many of his commands are we either ignoring or seeking to do in our own strength as shown by the fact that we NEVER PRAY ABOUT THEM?**
7. How many ways do we doubt Jesus' power when we say "If you can do anything, take pity on me!"

C. Meditate on Jesus' Stunning Words

Mark 9:23 'If you can'?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."

1. Meditate on OMNIPOTENCE
2. The God who spoke the entire universe into existence did so through his Son, Jesus Christ
3. God and Christ can do absolutely anything!

D. Pray the Man's Prayer

Mark 9:24 I do believe; help my unbelief!

Let him answer by saturating your mind in the Word, because "faith comes by hearing"

Let him answer by expanding your obedience to what you read, because the one who obeys God's word will know God better