

THE MISPLACED “IF”

Friday, August 4

Reading: Mark 9:14-29

Mark 9:24 *Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

After His glorious transfiguration on the mountain, Jesus arrived to confusion at the bottom of the mountain. A father had brought his demon-possessed son to be healed. Since Jesus was not available he asked the remaining 9 disciples to cast out the demon. When they could not the teachers of the law took the opportunity to ridicule them and deny Jesus' power and authority.

Jesus is upset both by the failure of the disciples and the unbelief of the religious leaders. Later Jesus would tell His disciples that their failure was because of a lack of preparation. They had recently returned from a “mission trip” where they had success casting out demons in Jesus' name (6:7-12). Perhaps they had taken this power for granted and believed they could use it whenever they wanted. This failure reminded them that the power was not their own but was drawn from a firm reliance on God.

Jesus now deals with the desperate father. He had faith to believe that Jesus was his son's last hope but his faith had been shaken by the failure of the disciples. This caused him to misplace the “if” in his plea for help. “If you can do anything...” Jesus turns his statement around in response - “Not if I can, but if YOU can believe.” The issue was not if Jesus could do it, the issue was if this man had faith to believe.

This father showed he had genuine faith by his response - “Lord, I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” True faith realizes its weakness and pleads for the Lord to help strengthen it. It is a cry that every believer should make! In response, Jesus casts out the demon and returns the boy to his father.

POINTS TO PONDER:

1. “If You Can?” Do we ever put the “if” in the wrong place? Do we place the problem with God when it is really us who are at fault? Just as this father and Jesus' disciples learned, receiving answers from God takes hard work. We must recognize our inability and trust in His perfect ability. We must put aside our wants and focus on God's will. There is an old anonymous poem that should make us think:

Trust Him when dark doubts assail thee / Trust Him when thy strength is small
Trust Him when to simply trust Him / Seems the hardest thing of all
Trust Him, He is ever faithful / Trust Him, for His will is best
Trust Him, for the heart of Jesus / Is the only place of rest ¹

What areas of faith do you need Christ to strengthen in your life?

2. “Why Couldn't We Drive It Out?” Like the disciples, many believers today turn to God in prayer only when the need arises or they are in trouble. But then it is too late. In order to have a strong faith in times of need, we must build our relationship with the Lord during times of peace. It must become a daily devotion. If the disciples had focused on their relationship with God in the quiet times, they would not have failed in the heat of battle with the enemy. What steps will you take to start a daily walk with God?

¹ <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/t/trust.htm>