

## Encounters with Jesus

Week 8 — Jesus and the Believing Father (Mark 9:13-29)

### Context:

Our passage comes immediately on the heels of Jesus' transfiguration, where he displayed his glory on the mountain to Peter, James, and John. It was the clearest demonstration of his divinity and a perfect parallel to Moses' own encounter with God on Mount Sinai. But as they came down the mountain, they encounter a crowd and a commotion, with the scribes and pharisees arguing with the other disciples. But it is in this passage that we meet a man who provides us a wonderful example of the heart of the Christian life.

### 1. The Faithless Generation

#### a. Scribes and Pharisees

- (1) At every opportunity the pharisees find ways to attempt to discredit or challenge Jesus — “he’s a sinner who eats with prostitutes and tax collectors”; “Why aren’t your disciples fasting?”; “By what authority do you do these things”
- (2) The pharisees no doubt jumped at the opportunity to use the disciples’ failure as evidence that Jesus himself has no power, which may very well have been the reason for their argument
- (3) Jesus rebukes the pharisees as wolves who actively mislead his people

#### b. The Disciples

- (1) Calvin argues that Jesus is not including his disciples in this rebuke “O faithless generation,” but it is in response to the testimony that the disciples failed to cast out the demon
- (2) This demon, Jesus said, could only come out with “prayer and fasting” — if the disciples failed to cast it out, that was a demonstration that they weren’t praying and fasting
- (3) Jesus rebukes them like a shepherd, seeking to correct his sheep; like a father seeking to correct children who need to learn

### 2. Prayer isn’t powerful—God is

#### a. Prayer and fasting

- (1) The disciples and the pharisees both demonstrate a kind of self-reliance that has been the problem from the very beginning, though that sin manifested in different ways
- (2) Prayer is not powerful as a technique of personal development, like meditation or weightlifting—prayer is powerful because it is by prayer that we enter the throne room of the living God who both loves us and is powerful to pursue our own good

#### b. Getting Comfortable With Where We’re At

- (1) Often we can become used to our current state, giving ourselves over to things which are harmful to us or which are sinful, but Jesus invites us to become connected to him — the true vine
- (2) Jesus calls us not to burdensome obedience, but to life from the dead — to freedom in faith

### 3. Belief and Unbelief

- a. "I believe, help my unbelief," is one of the most important prayers we could ever pray
  - (1) All of us have times of strong faith and times of weak faith — Jesus does not expect us to have perfect faith, but in humility to rely upon him
  - (2) Matt. 12:20 - A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out — Jesus does not turn away anyone who humbly cries out to him; he will not break you or snuff out the little faith you have, but works so that we would be conformed to his image.
  
- b. All things are possible for the one who believes
  - (1) This is not a passage which says that God will do whatever we want — it is a verse which says that God will act in the life of those who seek him**
  - (2) In a world of sin and death, we will all face suffering and pain, but we follow a God who will work all things so that they make us to look more like Christ himself

### 4. Takeaways

- (1) Pray: Because of Christ we are able to enter boldly into the throne room of grace so that we will find mercy in our times of need — it is no shame to acknowledge your weakness; it's the only way to experience new life
- (2) Get in community: Because of fear we often never allow anyone the opportunity to prove our fears wrong; in the body of Christ we will have difficulties, but we will also experience the redeeming love of God who draws us together
- (3) Let us know: no one should suffer alone and we do not want you to struggle alone — reach out so that we can help!

## Discussion Questions

1. What struck you about this passage (either hearing it for the first time, or in hearing again after a while)? Why do you think that resonated with you?
2. Consider this event in light of the transfiguration: what does the transfiguration show about who Jesus is? How do the disciples and pharisees misunderstand who Jesus is?

What are some misunderstandings you have had about God which has led you to think of God in ways that were false?

3. Discuss the father. How can you relate to him?

In what ways have you experience times where you were forced to pray something like “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief”?

4. Jesus shows us that we must rely upon God for true strength. How are you tempted to rely upon your own power? What would be some ways to take tangible steps in learning to rely upon God?

5. What are some of the fears you have with God, or with your own life, or how others think about you (I know — this is a difficult question and I don’t want to downplay that, but only by letting go of the fear can we experience the community we need)?

How can your group grow in being the kind of community that supports one another, especially in times of trial?