

All things are possible

Mark 9:14-29

Covenant Waterfall, 15 November 2020

Read

Pray

Introduction

It's the heart-breaking tragedy of our sin-cursed world that terrible things happen to us and those whom we love. Whether its sickness, cancer, loss of a job, sudden death of a loved one, or divorce, these things are a vivid reminder that we live in a world which is very much in darkness and suffering from the effects of the fall. And often it can appear that this darkness has the upper hand, causing us to lose hope and slip into unbelief.

In our passage this evening in Mark 9, Jesus' disciples are unable to cast a demon out of a boy. They are overwhelmed by the present darkness, by the effects of the curse, and because of this, they lose sight of Christ and what he's come to do. Their hope and faith in him gives way to doubt and unbelief.

The truth that we're going to see in this passage tonight, is that there is actually no reason to lose hope, even in the midst of the darkness. Why? We will see that Jesus is God's promised Messiah, the seed of the woman, which God promised to send right from the beginning, in Genesis 3:15, who has come to crush the head of the serpent, and reverse the curse. Death, sickness and sin will not have the last say. In the end, Jesus will triumph. And in this passage, we get a little glimpse precisely of that triumph that is to come in Christ.

Because Jesus has come to crush Satan and his works, we can have true hope, so trust in him!

- Plagued by unbelief, vv. 14-19
- Power of darkness, 20-25

- Resurrection, 26-29

A. Plagued by unbelief, vv.14-19

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."

Remember from a few weeks ago, passage immediately before this? Jesus was transfigured on the mountain. His divine glory was revealed, as he appeared together with Moses and Elijah, joined by his inner circle of disciples, Peter, James and John. Here they got a glimpse of the glorified Christ, a preview of what's to come. For just a moment, the veil was lifted and Jesus in all his divine majesty and glory was revealed.

In verse 14, we see now that Jesus and his inner circle descend the mountain. Find chaos and demonic oppression. What a stark contrast compared to what happened on Mt Transfiguration! Here we see a vivid reminder that this age is still captive to the darkness. The effects of the fall – Adam and Eve's sin – are very much alive and well.

Jesus and his inner circle descend the mountain to find the rest of the disciples in a chaotic situation. They are busy arguing with the scribes. What's happening? Verse 17 tells us that a man had brought his demon possessed son to the disciples while Jesus was up on the mountain. Because of the demonic spirit, the boy cannot speak, see later in verse 25 that he is deaf as well. The demon periodically seizes the boy and throws him on the ground where he starts foaming at the mouth, grinding his teeth and becomes rigid.

Instead of Jesus' disciples being able to help him, to set him free from this demonic oppression, reverse the curse, we see in verse 18, that they are unable to do so. Why? In theory that should have been able to.

Earlier in Mark's Gospel, in chapter 6:7, we saw that Jesus **"called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits."** Jesus commissioned them to act uniquely under his authority in order to drive out demons. Why then were they unable to do what Jesus had given them authority to do?

The reason is in the following verse, 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."** They can't drive out the demon because of their unbelief, their faithlessness. Because of this, Jesus rebukes them. What's interesting is that Jesus' rebuke here is an echo, almost copy and paste, of God's rebuke to the Israelites in the OT – in particular Deuteronomy 32. Nature of this rebuke? Israel's continued faithlessness in the face of God's faithfulness. God had saved them from slavery in Egypt, defeated Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt, delivered them with a mighty hand and outstretched arm, clearly shown that he was their God, demonstrated his steadfast, covenant love to them. Yet in spite of all this, they go after idols, forsaking the Lord and worship the golden calf.

By Jesus using this same language with his disciples, he is making a point. The disciples' unbelief is like Israel's unbelief. Even though they've been with Jesus for some time now, they've witnessed God's faithfulness and goodness through his ministry – that he's been setting free the oppressed, healing the sick, preaching good news to the poor – beginning to reverse the curse of the fall, demonstrating that he really is God's promised Messiah who has come to crush the head of the serpent – they still don't believe that he is able to fulfil his promises. They still don't quite grasp who he is, even after all he's done in front of them. They allow the darkness of their circumstances to overwhelm them and unbelief fills their hearts. Instead, they should have had faith to drive the demon out of the boy, knowing that it was for this very reason that Jesus had come – to destroy the works of the devil (1 Jn 3:8).

B. Power of darkness, vv.20-25

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.”

See in verse 20 that the boy is then brought to Jesus and immediately the demon convulses the boy as he comes into his presence. Darkness collides with the light. Then in verse 21 Jesus starts asking the boy’s father more questions and we discover that this has been happening for years, since he was very young. In fact, the demon has been trying to destroy the boy by pushing him into water and fire. Because the demon has also made the boy deaf and mute, added agony – he’s cut off from the world, isolated, can’t hear any words of comfort and love from his family in the midst of his suffering and torment. What a vivid picture of how darkness has worked itself out in a life, how the curse from Adam’s fall into sin has bound and oppressed a life.

Truth of Romans 5:12 here, **“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”** Clear example of how Adam’s fall has touched the entire human race, how this boy has been touched by the curse of the fall.

In verse 22, the boy’s father asks Jesus *if* he can do anything and have compassion on his son. Jesus responds in verse 23,

“And Jesus said to him, “If you can’t! All things are possible for one who believes.” ²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!”

Jesus is saying here to the Father – “trust in me!” All things are possible for those who believe in Jesus! The promises of God find their yes and amen in Christ (2 Cor 1:20). What promises? Those promises God had made in the OT, right from the beginning in Genesis 3:15, that he would one day send his Messiah to crush Satan under his feet and destroy the curse and the works of darkness. That promised Messiah has now arrived in Jesus and is about to fulfil all those promises!

The father responds in verse 24, “I believe; help my unbelief!” He confesses his trust in Jesus as God’s promised Messiah. He believes in his weakness – this is true faith. He takes God’s promises in his Word to heart, despite the crushing and dark circumstances. “Yes I know it

seems as if all is lost – son overwhelmed with demon, terror – yet I choose to trust that in spite of this, God is good and his promises in his Word will prevail!”

Finally, Jesus drives the demon out of the boy, verse 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.”

Jesus’ authority as God’s promised Messiah and Lord himself, is on display here. He casts the demon out of the boy with a word of his power. Demon has to submit to Christ and flees. Why? He is the Lord of heaven and earth and he is the promised seed of the woman who has come to crush the head of the serpent. This exorcism is a little glimpse, a foretaste of the great work Jesus will do on the cross – disarms the power of Satan, crushes his head.

C. Resurrection, vv.26-27

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.”

Jesus casts the demon out of the boy, see here, the demon left quite violently – crying out and convulsing. Had always been set on destroying the boy, as saw in verse 22, and here it looks like the demon succeeded. Verse 26 says that after the ordeal, the boy looked like a corpse, leading most of the onlookers to concluded that he was dead. Clues in the Greek text strongly suggest that the boy did actually die. We see this especially in the next verse 27, where Jesus takes the boy by the hand and he arose. The Greek word used for “arose” here is typically used for resurrection from the dead.

So Jesus delivers this boy from demonic oppression, raises him from the dead and restores him to full health – able to speak and hear, no more fits. He’s a new creation in Christ, having been raised from death to life. The effects of the fall and the curse have been

reversed. The darkness which once enveloped his whole life, has been overcome – he has been set free from captivity.

Picture of how salvation indeed belongs to the Lord. Jesus sovereignly raised him from the dead, gave him a new heart of flesh, brought him to life and saved him from the clutches of darkness. The boy played absolutely no part in it. He did not contribute anything to his salvation. All a work of his sovereign grace! Exactly the same way as God saved us – found us in the clutches of sin and death, undeserving though we were, reached down to us and raised us to new life, all through the Spirit's power and by his grace in Christ!

Jesus' raising of the boy also points to his own resurrection. Crucified on the cross, he took the penalty for sin that we all deserved. He faced judgement meant for us – he was our substitute for our sins. Yet because he was sinless, death had no hold over him and God raised him from the dead by the power of the Spirit, on the third day. In rising again from the dead, Jesus disarmed the powers of darkness – he broke the power of sin and death. Colossians 2:15 says that on the cross, **“He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”** His resurrection from death on the cross was the fulfilment of God's promise all the way back in Genesis 3:15, to crush Satan and the powers of darkness, to triumph over them!

This miracle of Jesus delivering the boy from demonic power and raising him from the dead is ultimately a glimpse and points to Jesus' triumph over Satan on the cross.

Conclusion

Dismayed at your circumstances? Perhaps trying to make sense of a tragedy? Overwhelmed in this sin-cursed world? It can be easy to lose hope and fall into unbelief and despair when we are preoccupied with our circumstances.

What we've seen in this passage is that as dark and as evil as this sin-cursed world can be, Satan and his forces are not the ones who will have the last say. Though sin and the curse entered the world through Adam, God has sent a second Adam to restore what the first Adam had ruined. Romans 5:18-19 -

“Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.”

Our natural state – under a curse, descendants of the first Adam, under condemnation because of our sin and our disobedience to God. Result? God is just to condemn us for all eternity.

Yet because of God’s promise, right from Genesis 3:15, to send the seed of the woman, a Messiah, a second Adam who would restore what the first Adam lost – crush the head of the serpent, obey God. Result? All who trust in him are not condemned, but are instead justified and declared righteous before God.

Brothers and sisters, repent and receive Jesus Christ. In him, there is hope! He has crushed the head of the serpent, and destroyed the power of sin, death and darkness. Though we may still endure evil in this age, we can know that in Christ, God will surely triumph. There will come a day when Jesus will destroy Satan by the breath of his mouth. On that Day, Jesus will return to this earth, wipe away every tear, no more death, or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order will be brushed away! Our God will dwell with us, his beloved people for all eternity.

Romans 16:20, **“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”**

Amen