

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor Emeritus
Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com)
18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
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Mark 9:14-29 (read vv. 14-18) “Why We Lack Spiritual Power”

Intro. In the first 9 verses of this chapter, we are told about the glorious transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter, James, and John were privileged to witness the brightness of the glory of the divine nature of Jesus Christ. In fact, they heard the voice of God say, “This is my beloved Son, hear Him.” There was no doubt in the mind of these disciples that they were standing in the very presence of the Son of God. They had seen Jesus perform powerful miracles, but now they had seen an obvious manifestation of God’s glory in the face of Jesus. After that glorious mountaintop experience, Jesus led Peter, James, and John down the mountain to rejoin the rest of the disciples who were waiting below.

The events that follow their arrival at the foot of the mountain are very instructive to us. Jesus came upon a sad scene, in stark contrast to the glory of the mountaintop experience. There was a teenage boy who was powerless to break free from a demonic spirit. There was his father who was powerless to help his son. And there were the 9 other disciples. Notice what the father said of them in v.18, “...I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but *they could not*.” In the presence of this demon, they were powerless. Like Samson when his hair was cut, they are as weak as anyone else.

This describes so many people. Someone may say, “I wanted to resist temptation, but I could not.” Someone else says, “I wanted to resist peer pressure, but I could not.” Another says, “I wanted to witness to someone about Jesus, but I could not.” This is the picture of the drug addict who is powerless to break free from an addiction. Then when people come to the church needing help with serious problems, often the typical church says, “Sorry, we can’t help you.”

But I have good news for you today. You can learn how to move from saying, “I can’t” to what Paul said in Php. 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” I want you to know that you can literally experience the power of God in your life. If this Book is true, that statement is true. In Phil. 3:10 Paul also wrote, “that I might know Him and the power of His resurrection...”¹ Paul clearly implies that we can and should experience the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. I want to show you from this passage of Scripture how you can learn to experience the Lord’s power in your life.

Now first of all, consider with me the fact that:

I. WE NEED GOD’S POWER

Perhaps right now you are facing a situation in life that seems impossible to handle. The scene at the bottom of the mountain illustrates the fact that we need God’s power, especially to face similar difficulties. Yet like the disciples, too many people try to live life relying upon their *own* strength. The disciples soon discovered that they were facing a situation that they just couldn’t handle. So in this text we see illustrations of three groups of people who need the Lord’s power. Just about all of us fall within at least one of these groups. I believe:

¹ Likewise, Paul prayed in Eph. 1:18-20 that “the eyes of your understanding being enlighten, that you may know...what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead...”

A. Our Children Need God's Power – Our text tells us of a man's son who was demon possessed. He was powerless to break free of the dominating and destructive power of this demon (vv.17-18). We do not face much demon possession in our country, but in much of the 3rd World it is still a problem. And notice that v.21 tells us he was demon possessed from the time he was a child.

This boy developed several problems that he was powerless to overcome. In v.17 we see he could not speak. He probably could not speak because in v.25 we see he was also deaf, probably from childhood. Furthermore, from v.18 we see that he appeared to have what some would call a severe form of epilepsy. He would experience convulsions. He would foam at the mouth, gnash with his teeth, and stiffen up like a board. And v.21 tells us that the problem had been going on for years. It's one thing for a child to be sick for a week; it altogether different when it continues for years! Finally, v.22 indicates that the boy seemed to be suicidal as he would cast himself into the fire or water. Actually, it was a demon who caused these problems and was seeking to destroy and hurt him. In fact, Jesus indicated in John 10:10 that Satan and his demons are out to steal, kill, and destroy.

Satan and his demons are still out to destroy and ruin lives, including the lives of children. Why is it that the LGBTQ+ folks want to indoctrinate young children in their lifestyles? Many children and youth today are being bombarded with immoral filth through TV, movies, music, the Internet, and from their friends. They are also being wasted and ruined with social media, pornography, drugs, and alcohol. Our young people need the power of God to resist the powerful temptations that are thrown at them, and others need the power of God to break free from their addictions. Too many end up in juvenile detention centers, or jail, or end up dead.

So we ought to be just as diligent in reaching boys and girls for Christ before the devil reaches them for destruction. If you teach children in Sunday School, or AWANA, or VBS, I want you to know how important your job is. It is never too soon to strive and pray for the salvation of the souls of children—never too soon to speak to them about right and wrong as moral beings and tell them of God and Christ, who alone can save us from our sins.

I also see from this text that:

B. Parents Need God's Power – One of the toughest jobs many of you will ever have is being a parent, especially in today's world. Our text (v.17) tells us of one father who had an extremely difficult job raising and protecting his son, and I'm sure he was wore out! The gospel of Luke tells us that this was the father's only son. So here was this father whose only son was in such a desperate condition. Imagine what it would be like for that father to try to care for the boy and protect him! Any parent of a special needs child can identify with this father. No wonder he said in v.22, "Have compassion on *us*." He confessed his own great need as well. It would indeed take strength to overcome such a desperate situation, or even to manage it.

Do you need the power of the Lord as a parent? Are you facing a problem with your children that seems too great for you to handle? Raising children in today's world is tough, and I believe many would agree that you need God's power and guidance to raise children.

Our text tells us of another group of people that needs God's power:

C. The Church Needs God's Power - We see this illustrated in the disciples of Jesus. The father actually brought the boy to Jesus, but when he arrived, Jesus was not there. He was up in the mountain. So the father evidently asked the disciples to help his boy, since Jesus was gone. But

here's the problem: in v.18 we see that the father said to Jesus, "I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not." They tried, but they could not. They were powerless before this demon.

Can you imagine what it must have been like? Jesus was gone. The 3 leading disciples were also gone. And the 9 were left to deal with a difficult situation. Perhaps Judas stepped forward. He was the Treasurer of the group, the only officer left. So he said, "Demon, in the name of Jesus I cast you out," and nothing happened. Then ole Matthew may have said, "Oh Judas, move over. Let me try. You didn't say it right. In the name of Jesus *of Nazareth* I cast you out." Likewise, nothing happened. Perhaps Andrew and several others tried without success, and the demon laughed.

Today, the church is in a similar situation. Jesus is not physically with us. We are facing great problems. And what is the Church doing about these problems? If we are honest, we are having too little impact upon society. In fact, I see society having more impact upon the church than the church having an impact upon society! We may see an occasional victory here and there. But we are not seeing as many souls saved and lives changed as we should. Why are we not able to cast out the evil spirits of greed, immorality, pride, and addiction? Why aren't more prayers for healing answered? Why are we so often powerless even to overcome our own problems that we face? Too many churches are dead like the church of Sardis in the book of Revelation.

So I believe you will agree that we need God's power. Human strength is often inadequate to overcome the difficulties we face. So let's consider next:

II. WHY WE OFTEN LACK GOD'S POWER

We see this question raised in v.28. The disciples later got alone with Jesus and asked why they couldn't cast out the demon. They had cast out demons before. Was there something wrong with their technique? Perhaps they thought they were not saying the right words to perform an exorcism.

I want to share with you two reasons why they, and we, can be powerless in the face of difficult situations. Before you can solve a problem, you must first recognize the causes of the problem. And if you lack the power of God in your life, then one or both of these reasons may be the cause. Certain things can cut off the supply line of power from God to us. So what was it that was cutting off the supply of God's power in this situation? The first cause of their powerlessness was:

A. Unbelief - Even before the disciples asked the reason for their failure, Jesus indicated one reason for the powerlessness in v.19. He said to them, "O faithless generation." It seemed that the whole generation of Israelites was without faith. Matthew's account of this story makes it clearer. In Mt. 17:20 Jesus said they could not cast out the demon "because of your little faith." With Jesus not physically present with them, they lacked faith. They had too much faith in themselves, in past victories (3:15; 6:13) and too little in Christ. We can make the same mistake today.

There was also a lack of faith in the father. He had enough faith to bring his son to Jesus in the first place, but after the failure of the disciples, his faith was wavering. In the last of v.22 he said to Jesus, "If You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Notice he said, "If you can" to Jesus. Literally, it is "If anything you are able," or "if you have the power" (*dunamai*). There is a hope expressed that Jesus *might* have the power to help his son, but he's not confident. Then in v.23 Jesus quotes those words back to him, "If you can..." What do you mean, "If you

can...”? There is no faith in that statement. So Jesus corrects his lack of faith saying, “All things are possible to him that believes.” Jesus rebuked the lack of faith in this father. The problem is not lack of power on Jesus’ part but a lack of faith in the *father’s* life. Jesus can do the impossible!

When you face what seems to be an impossible situation, do you lack faith that God can and will help you? Are you confident in the power of God? James 1:6 says, “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting....” Then James goes on to say of the one who doubts, “For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord....” Likewise, Adrian Rogers said, “Pray and doubt; you’ll do without. Pray and believe; you will receive.”² So the Scripture is clear. One reason we lack God’s power is our lack of faith in God.

There is another reason we lack God’s power, and that is due to our:

B. Prayerlessness – Jesus said in v.29, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.” I will focus on the word “prayer” because “fasting” is probably a later scribal addition.³ Jesus clearly implies that the disciples had failed to pray as they should. I’m not talking about saying a quick prayer before trying to cast out the demon. As far as we know, Jesus did not say a prayer before doing so. What is more important is that the disciples probably had failed to maintain a consistent prayer life. While Jesus was up on the mountain praying (Lk. 9:28), what were the disciples doing? They were probably sitting around a campfire, eating and telling stories and jokes! They probably prayed very little while Jesus was away. And when the father asked them to help his son, they did not go aside and pray, and seek God’s face. They just assumed that since they had cast out demons before (6:13), they could do it again.

I believe that prayerlessness is a major cause of *our* lack of power. Preachers who preach without prayer support will lack the power of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. In 45 years of ministry, I have preached over 4,000 Sunday sermons. It would be too easy to assume that I could preach another sermon without prayer, but if I did, my sermon would lack power. Sunday School teachers, did you spend time in prayer before teaching your lesson? Church member, did you pray for this church service today? If not, how can you expect God to do a powerful work in our midst?

Now the two go hand in hand. Where there is little faith, there is little prayer. After all, why bother praying if you do not believe it will do any good? Conversely, where there is an abundance of genuine, persevering faith, there is also fervent, unrelenting prayer. Prayer is a measure of your faith.

Now the disciples should have been thankful, even for their failure, for it is the failure that led them back to prayer. And how true that is today as well! Your failure is God’s reminder to pray and rely wholly upon God’s power.

[Review] So we have seen that we need God’s power as we face the many challenges of life and ministry. We have seen that we often lack God’s power, and we have seen why. So what is God’s answer to this problem? Well let’s see last of all:

III. HOW TO EXPERIENCE GOD’S POWER

In this story we see the power of God demonstrated. In v.25 we read that Jesus “rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, ‘Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!’” The evil spirit that was in the boy made use of his last opportunity to attack him before

² Adrian Rogers, *Adrianisms: the Wit and Wisdom of Adrian Rogers* (Love Worth Finding Ministries) [Illus.#C-1640].

³ The addition of “and of fasting” does not appear in the two best Greek manuscripts (Aleph and B). It is clearly a late addition to help explain the failure [Robertson].

he left. V.26 says, “Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, ‘He is dead.’” There was not a sign of movement, nor a sign of life. The multitude was awed, wondering what had happened. I think I can see the face of the father as he stared down at what appeared to be a dead body. Then he turned back to Jesus with a bewildered look. But then v.27 says, “But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.” What power! Here we see our Lord’s complete dominion over Satan and all his agents. The spirit who was too strong for the disciples was at once driven out by the Master. Satan is strong, busy, active, and malicious, but he is no match against the power of Jesus! Let us remember that “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). The Holy Spirit within the Christian can endow *us* with the power of God.

I like what Luke 9:42 adds, “[He] gave him back to his father.” The devil has stolen many a child from their parents, and I would like to see them reconciled and restored to their parents by the power of God! I would like to see more people saved and converted to Christ. After all, the Bible says that the gospel “is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16).

So how can we get the power of God back into our families, our churches, and into our personal lives? We need to look no further than these plain words of Jesus to His disciples. First of all:

A. We Must Place Our Faith in Jesus – In v.17 we see that the father said, “Teacher, I brought You my son.” The father had heard about Jesus, how He had healed many others and cast out demons. So he brought him to Jesus. Then, notice in v.19 that Jesus says, “Bring him to me.”

Isn’t that the solution to the problems that people face today? Take your problems to *Jesus*. Put your faith in *Jesus*. That’s what parents ought to do. You ought to bring your children to Jesus. What matters most is not the size of your faith but the object of your faith. Learn to rely wholly upon Christ. You must believe that He can empower you to overcome whatever difficulty you face. Come to Jesus, dear friend, and you will find a Savior. Place your faith in Jesus and you will find a new power for living. Jesus can help you overcome an addiction. He will help you overcome temptation. He will help you serve Him and others with new-found strength. We can always come to Jesus when others fail us.

To be honest, we must admit that too often, we lack strong faith. In fact, in Matthew’s account Jesus said their faith was “little.” The father in our story had a mix of faith and doubt. So I want to share with you from our text 3 ways that our faith can be strengthened:

1. Consider What God Has Done for Others - The father had some faith because he had heard how Jesus had cast out demons from other people. So we need to hear and read of eye witness accounts of the power of Jesus. The more we learn about the proper object of our faith, the greater our faith should be. Our text gives one example that I just read to you (vv.25-27). The gospel of John contains a record of 8 miracles that Jesus performed. At the conclusion of his book John wrote, “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (20:30-31).

So we need to read again and again the Word of God. Rom. 10:17 says, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” There are many stories in the Bible of God’s great power. We would also do well to read or hear of more current testimonies of God’s power at work. Read Christian biographies. Come to testimony services like we had last Sunday. Order the CD if you missed it. And when you experience the power of God in your own life, you ought to share your own testimony with others, to build up *their* faith. There’s a beautiful song that says, “It is no

secret what God can do, what he did for others, He'll do for you."

2. Ask for Stronger Faith – Notice in v.24 the father said to Jesus, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" Knowing that faith was essential for his son's healing, he asked for the Lord's help. The father was willing to admit that His faith was weak. In its infancy, faith may and does co-exist with some doubt. We must ask God to increase our faith and cast out our doubts. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." Even so, if you lack faith, ask God to give you more faith.

3. Claim God's Promises - In Titus 1:2 Paul spoke of the hope of eternal life, "which God, who cannot lie, promised..." When we realize that God cannot lie, then we can have absolute faith and confidence in His promises. And what a great promise Christ gave to this father in the last of v.23, "all things are possible to him who believes." Here we have our Lord telling us that faith is omnipotent because *God* is omnipotent. Yet faith is as impotent in itself as the hollow water pipe is. But when it is directed and connected to God, it is the channel between the fullness of God and the emptiness of man. John wrote, "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith." →If you are facing an impossible situation, remember this promise of Jesus.

There is another requirement for experiencing the power of God in our lives. We must not only have faith, but also:

B. We Must Be Persistent in Prayer – Again, Jesus said in v.29, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer." Jesus is teaching us that if we are going to experience God's power, we must keep praying until the power is manifest.

Daniel was a powerful leader, and he prayed three times a day. King David had power over giants and was a powerful ruler. He was protected from harm many, many times. He had a regular prayer life. The disciples of Jesus led a movement that changed the world. What was the secret to *their* power? In Acts 2 the church was born in a prayer meeting, and in Acts 3 we read that the disciples went to the temple regularly to pray. They learned the lesson that Jesus taught them. Everyone who has power with God and man has a consistent prayer life. And if we are going to experience God's power, we must pray. →Prayer is simply an acknowledgement that we are relying upon God, and not ourselves. We live in a difficult world, and we need to pray more than ever. Will you make it your goal to engage in believing prayer *every* day?

I could tell story after story of answered prayer. After Cheryl was facing a series inflammatory illness that even caused kidney failure, more and more people, even in other parts of the country prayed for her. Tonight, you have seen and heard the answer to your prayers!

In February, 2007, a group traveled down from our church to Southeastern Seminary to hear me preach in chapel. On the way back they stopped to get gas and realized that no one had a key to the gas cap. They were over 100 miles from home, and didn't have enough gas to get much beyond the VA state line. Some tried to get the gas cap off, but failed. Some started praying. Then Darlene Bass' husband, David, asked different people at the gas station if they thought they could help get the gas cap off. Finally, one person said he would try. With just his bare hand he twisted the cap in such a way that it came off, even without a key! God answers prayer! [Illus.#C-1685]

I believe that God answers prayer even about little things. About 14 years ago on our trip back from Georgia, I wanted to get a head start and drive up the road to South Carolina and spend the night there. Well, I have found that I could get some good deals through Priceline. I decided to bid on a two-star motel, but I only offered \$45. So I prayed, "Lord help me get a good motel at that price." Well, after praying I clicked the computer and waited for an answer. Not only did they accept my bid, but they upgraded us to an Embassy Suites in a golf resort! That was one of the best

2-room suites we have ever stayed in! In fact, Cheryl commented after walking into the room, “You’ve never done this good in getting us a motel room.” It even included an all-you-can-eat breakfast buffet the next morning! God is good, and He answers prayer!

Conclusion: How is your prayer life? So often I have seen a direct link between my prayer life and the working of God in my ministry. If a church is not experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit, is it because of the prayerlessness of the pastor or deacons? Is it because of the prayerlessness of the congregation? The average pastor prays 5 minutes/day and the average layman prays 1 minute/day. Will you make any changes in your prayer life? More of you can come to our Wednesday prayer meeting. Perhaps you can start a prayer group that will meet weekly primarily to pray.

If God is not working to overcome the difficulties we face, is it a lack of faith? Will you take steps I suggested to build your faith? Let’s bow in prayer and ask God to search our hearts at this time.

Sources: William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); Clarence E. Macartney (notes from his sermon on this text); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:80] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2021); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931, accessed through *Online Bible*); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Jerry Vines (notes from sermon on this text dated 1/15/84); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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