

Title: The Book of Mark: Part 25, "Help My Unbelief"

Speaker: Neil Chotai

Passage: Mark 9:14-29

Big idea: The way to combat unbelief is to demonstrate total dependence on Christ.



- <sup>14</sup> When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them <sup>15</sup> As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.
- <sup>16</sup> "What are you arguing with them about?" he asked.
- <sup>17</sup> A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. <sup>18</sup> 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."
- <sup>19</sup> "You unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."
- <sup>20</sup> So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.
- <sup>21</sup> Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"
- "From childhood," he answered. <sup>22</sup> "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."
- <sup>23</sup> "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."
- <sup>24</sup> Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"
- <sup>25</sup> When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."
- <sup>26</sup> The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." <sup>27</sup> But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.
- <sup>28</sup> After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"
- <sup>29</sup> He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."

#### Mark 9:14-29

This is a continuation of the same storyline we saw last week when it came to the transfiguration. There are many contrasts from this passage of Scripture to what we saw last week.

In the Renaissance period, Italian artist Raphael paints a picture depicting the passage of scripture we looked at last week, and what we will be looking at today.

Last week we were on the mountain and now we are back in the valley. Last week there was a small group of individuals and this week there is a crowd. On the mountain there was peace in the valley there is torment. In the mountains the Son was glorified and in the valley the Son is being tormented.

Jesus is with Peter, James, and John and now they come down, they descend the mountain top and they come down and thrust into a scene of total chaos. It is like being in church on a Sunday, having a great day and all of a sudden it is Monday morning, and you have the chaos of the week that is right in front of you.



We are now looking at everyday living in this section of Scripture today. We are going to be looking at faith, not the Faith, but our faith. There are certain Scriptures that God has given us in which we have to look, not gloss over and we have to see ourselves within that Scripture. There is a mirror and we need to analyze what we see when we look in that mirror. And that is the type of message that we have today that God shows us within the Scriptures.

Some of us in this room may have been Christ followers for decades, others perhaps for a few weeks, and still others maybe on a spiritual journey checking out Christianity. We are imperfect people on this planet. We who believe in Christ strive to follow a perfect God through the revelation that we have within Scripture, in a relationship with Christ by the guidance and comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Have you ever faced unbelief in your walk with God? I am assuming the answer would be yes. There are times when we have unbelief that comes into our lives, we are still followers of God, still in relationship with Jesus, but we still battle unbelief. We battle the flesh; we still have battles in our minds affected by sin and the corruption that it brought before we became Christians. And today as we look at the Scripture, we are wanting to combat unbelief in our life. I am not talking about salvation for you are sealed in Christ, but I am talking about the everyday workings that we live in. So, what do we do? How do we battle this unbelief on a daily basis?

## **BIG IDEA**

The way to combat unbelief is to demonstrate total **dependence on Christ**.



This big idea is not profound it is just back to the basics yes, a dependence on Christ and the question is how dependent are we on Christ with our relationship with him?

Mark 9:14, “When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them.”

Jesus comes down with Peter, James and John after the transfiguration experience and they see the other disciples engaged in a debate with the teachers of the law, some translations will use the word Scribes. And it was not a cordial debate, there was an argument taking place.

Commentators wonder where this passage takes place. If it took place around Mount Hermon, that meant that the teachers of the law had to go north, and it shows that they are following and monitoring Jesus’ teaching and preaching. They are ready to pounce and confront Jesus at every opportunity. This passage of scripture is also found within the books of Matthew 17:14-19 and Luke 9:37-42, but Mark gives more of a complete picture of the biblical account,

Why were they arguing? Later on, we find out that there is a father who brought his child to the disciples to free him from demonic possession. The nine disciples could not cast out the demon and the teachers of the law pointed a finger at them. They were making the point that Jesus is a fraud and not who he said he really is.

Mark 9:15, “As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.”

And as Jesus comes into the picture, the crowd sees him, and they run towards him because they are full of wonder, and they wanted to greet Jesus because he was very well known at this time.

I can just imagine this moment. There was a great spiritual moment that just took place with Jesus and the transfiguration and now he along with three of the closest disciples come onto this scene wondering what has happened. Obviously, Jesus being God knows what is happening.

I could imagine Jesus all of a sudden looking at the nine disciples that were left and the teachers of the law arguing with them and then seeing a great crowd. In all of this commotion there is a father, perhaps a mother too, with a son that is demon possessed.

Mark 9:16, “What are you arguing with them about?” he asked.”

Jesus, addressing the teachers of the law, probably knew what was happening, but he is trying to take the attention off the disciples in order to deal with the situation at hand.

The question is asked and as he is waiting for a response from the teachers of the law but, there is an interruption from another individual.

Mark 9:17-18, “A man in the crowd answered, ‘Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. 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.’”

The father gives a graphic description of what is happening to his son. While some of the symptoms are like epilepsy in nature, there is more to this than just epilepsy. It is the kingdom of darkness at work through a demon that has possessed this child. The child could not speak because the demon throws him on the ground. The boy is foaming at the mouth, gnashing his teeth and he becomes rigid.

It was no secret that Jesus healed people and cast out demons. This father searches Jesus out and when he cannot find Jesus he goes to the next best thing, the disciples. He asked them to drive out the evil spirit, but they could not. The phrase they could not literally means they were “not strong enough” to do it.

We saw earlier in Mark 6 that Jesus sent out the 12 disciples on a trial mission and Mark specifically states that on occasions they did cast out demons. However, it seems that the power that Jesus gave the disciples for that mission was temporary. The real empowerment for ministry does not happen until the day of Pentecost when Jesus ascends to heaven sends his Holy Spirit as promised found in Acts 1:8 and Acts 2:1-4.

Mark 9:19-20, “‘You unbelieving generation,’ Jesus replied, ‘how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.’ So, they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.”

The reaction of Jesus in verse 19 is from part of Psalm 95:10, referring to God's patient endurance with the faithless Israelites, a “generation of the wandering” when they were in the wilderness. Jesus’ statement of an “unbelieving generation” is not addressed to the crowds but addressed to his disciples in a lament.

His lamenting was not at their lack of power, but their lack of faith, their disbelief. These are the people who have been with Jesus for some time, and they have seen many miracles take place, but there was a lack of faith, doubt, unbelief in the air. It weighed on Jesus that his own disciples were slow in this. He is aware of their spiritual obtuseness. However, whenever we see Jesus with his disciples, he is patient with them and with us. Despite his lament over the disciples’ unbelief, Jesus wants to know more about this boy.

Jesus asks for the boy. Here Mark describes the conflict between Jesus and the demonic powers. Immediately the demon throws the boy into a convulsive fit and violently he is thrown to the ground rolls around and foams at the mouth.

Mark 9:21-22, “Jesus asked the boy’s father, ‘How long has he been like this?’ ‘From childhood,’ he answered. ‘It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.’”

Jesus, in his compassion asks the father how long this has been going on. He genuinely cares for the situation at hand, and he sees what the father and his family have gone through and all the suffering that has taken place. We find out further that the violence of the demonic realm is so great that the child has been thrown into fire and thrown into water so that the child could die.

The job description of the demonic realm is to destroy that which is made in the image of God. The demonic realm does not like humans because we are created in God’s likeness, and Christians because we are redeemed by God through the sacrifice of the cross. The enemy will do everything it can to separate humans from having a relationship with God.

The spiritual realm is very different from what we see in the earthly realm. It is literally a war in the heavenly realms taking place between good and evil. It has happened in the past, it is happening right now, and it will happen in the future, only to end with the final judgement. The enemy is trying as hard as it can take away as many people from God as possible.

Could you imagine what the father and the mother were suffering because of the demonic attack? They would have had to look after him every single day, morning, and nighttime. Making sure that he was not being thrown into fire, making sure that they could save him from what the demon was doing. In society they would have been outcasts because nobody would want to be around them or help them. They would have been exhausted. So, the father goes to the Son of God, seeking help for his son who is being tormented. God has compassion, asking this father for more details, even though Jesus knows what is happening.

The father says something interesting to Jesus, “But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

Jesus responds:

Mark 9:23, “‘If you can?’ said Jesus. ‘Everything is possible for one who believes.’”

Jesus immediately fixed on the father’s “if” clause. The question was not whether Jesus had the power to heal the boy, but whether the father had faith to believe Jesus could, with the line “everything is possible for him who believes”.

This statement needs to be taken into context. We are free to ask what we will, but only if it is what God’s will is. It is to ask with the mind of Christ given to us by the Holy Spirit.

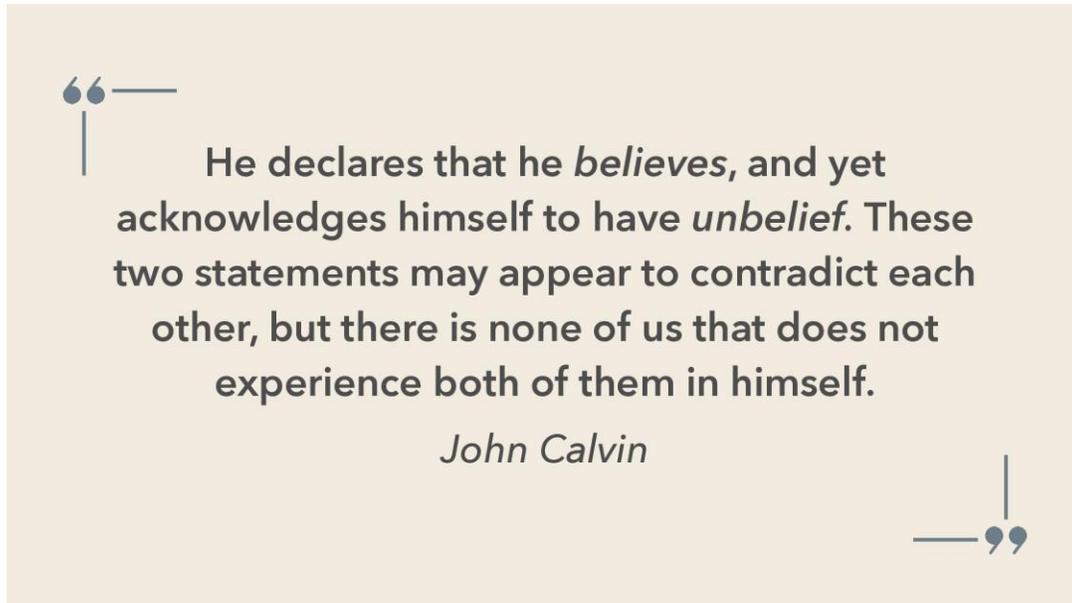
This is also a warning against taking one statement of scripture in isolation from others and basing a theology on these types of prayers. It is not a blank check to cash, but it is a prayer that we must have with the mind of Christ, asking God according to His good and pleasing will. This verse has been hijacked and taken out of context and has its influence by Neo-Gnosticism.

Jesus’ statement which is really a promise, elicited faith from the father.

Mark 9:24, “Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, ‘I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!’”

The father says that he believes, but he recognized that his faith was far from perfect. It was still mixed with unbelief. In his honesty, he asked Jesus to help him overcome his unbelief.

John Calvin stated the following about this verse:



Every Christian has some level of authentic saving faith in their heart. However, the intensity of it is not constant, it increases and diminishes. The father's cry for help, confessing the poverty of his faith, is answered by Jesus, not according to the poverty of the man's faith, but according to the riches of God's grace.

It is a great illustration of the doctrine of justification by faith. Justification is not earned through our own works; rather, we are covered by the righteousness of Jesus Christ

Mark 9:25, "When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. 'You deaf and mute spirit,' he said, 'I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.'"

After the father's declaration to Jesus, we see a crowd that is running towards the scene. Jesus never wanted crowds of sightseers and he wanted to deliberately avoid them in this situation, because he thought their motives would be unworthy and he refused to perform any miracles before any individuals that had that same thinking. Jesus wanted to avoid publicity and drove out the spirit before the people came.

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.' But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up."

The casting out of the demon came with cries and convulsions. The effect on the boy was so violent that he looked like he was dead. And people said that he was dead. But Jesus took him by the hand lifted him up and he the boy stood up.

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

After this miracle occurred the disciples were probably curious as to why they were not able to perform this miracle. Jesus takes his disciples into a private area to explain why.

His explanation is very simple. He says this kind can come out only by prayer. They thought that in this situation they faced, all they had to do was to repeat what was done before. But they could not rely on what happened before. They needed to consistently be in prayer at all times. In Mark 6:7 they had been given authority over evil spirits to successfully cast them out. They had taken for granted the power that was given to them or worst-case scenario they believed in themselves and no longer decided to depend on God through prayer.

As Jesus is giving these details to the disciples it is interesting to see that they still were not able to understand what was happening and did not realize their need for total dependence on Christ.

The question remains for us; how do we demonstrate a total dependence on Christ?  
I am going to quickly go through four takeaways from this passage to help us in our unbelief.



You are probably thinking, I already did this when I became a Christian. Yes, that is very important when you become a follower Jesus Christ. However, repentance is a daily act, or it should be a daily act.

Why? Because we sin every day. We need to treat unbelief like any other sin. Because what we are saying is that I have everything figured out and I am dependent only on myself. When we think that way, pride comes in and we no longer are humbled before God.

We must take a position of a contrite heart before God. Now God isn't pointing a finger at you and saying you better repent or else... No, we go to God with the humble heart, we repent before him because God wants to have a beautiful relationship with Him.

Repentance is going before God and saying that I have this lack of trust in Him and want to make it right. Repentance will deepen our relationship with Christ, and we will have more of a dependence on him. As opposed to dependence on our own selves. It is okay to be dependent on God because we are nothing without him. Every breath we take is because of him. Being dependent on God is not weakness, it is actually strength. Because I'm relying on somebody who is stronger than me.

When I need to move something at my house, I call the strongest people I know to come help because I know I can depend on them to help me move a piece of furniture. It also prevents me from breaking my back but that's a secondary issue.

Jesus said, "blessed are the humble for they will inherit the earth".



Do you remember the story of Thomas after the resurrection of Jesus? He did not believe the disciples in John 20. The only way that he could believe was if he actually saw Jesus.

A week later the disciples are all together and Jesus comes. He tells Thomas to put his finger by his side and hands. Jesus states directly to him stop doubting and BELIEVE.

There is freedom in believing. If we choose to live with belief, we choose not to doubt. When we doubt, we choose to distrust God. We need to lay down our disbelief. The book of Hebrews 12 talks about laying aside every weight that hinders us. And unbelief is a weight that we carry, so we need to throw that down and believe and have the freedom to run the race that God has called us to.



Laying your unbelief aside, means to obey God and trust him. Proverbs 3:5-6. We can still trust God even though we may not know where we are going on our path. We keep going forward in our lives. We may not know the answers to everything, but that is okay. Obey God and he will lead you, by placing a light on your path, to bring clarity to you. Choose to obey God in the face of everything that is happening in your life. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” We depend on him, trust him, and obey him. Not because he is a mean master and we are his slaves, but because he is a benevolent Father, that knows best, and we serve Him in love and obey Him and he shows us our destiny.



Our spiritual lives began in prayer when we prayed, the Holy Spirit came within us he transforms our mind to be the mind of Christ to be in his will to walk in the path that he has given us. That all began in prayer.

Every single song to God has been birthed in prayer. Every single sermon has been birthed in prayer. Every single person that has come into relationship with God was because of prayer. This entire church that exists today was because of prayer. And look at what those prayers have accomplished.

With more prayer, there is greater faith, but the opposite is true. Lack of prayer leads to lack of faith and unbelief.

Lack of prayer is the root of failure in the spiritual world. I believe it is a lack of prayer, or a vibrant, active, consistent prayer life that leads to unbelief. If our prayer lacks vibrancy, being active or being consistent where will that lead us? Lack of prayer leads to lack of faith. And with that comes less prayer and with that becomes less faith and with that becomes even lesser prayer and lesser faith. It is a downward spiral.

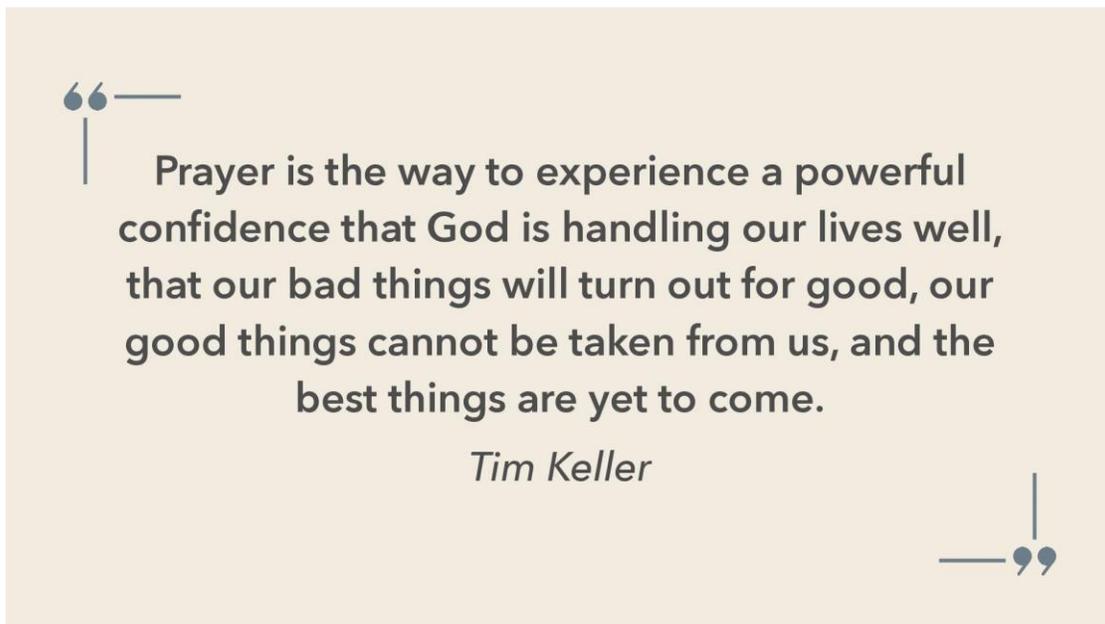
Can you be a Christian and lack prayer in your life? Of course, you can.

But is that what the Lord wants you to have? No, he doesn't.

He wants you to have an active prayer life. An active prayer life is something that the enemy does not want to see because active prayer life builds up our belief.

Prayer is extremely important; I cannot stress it enough. And it is easy to agree when you are here in church, but what happens when we leave this place? What does our prayer life look like?

I want to close with this quote from Tim Keller:



Do you believe that the best things are yet to come in your life? We need to get on our knees or whenever prayer posture you take and pray. We are going to have unbelief in our lives but let's fight it, let us be a people of prayer.