JESUS HEALS A BOY WITH AN EVIL SPIRIT

Mark 9:14-32

Key Verse: 9:23b

"Everything is possible for him who believes."

Jesus was transfigured on the Mount of Transfiguration. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. This was Jesus' original image as God. This was a pre­view of Jesus' glori­ous resurrec­tion body. This was Jesus' glorious image, in which he will come again to this world as King of kings to bring us back to his glori­ous and eternal kingdom. Jesus showed us a glorious im­age of himself as God so that we may imprint on our hearts his glori­ous image, and at the same time, erase all the evil images in us. In today's passage, 9:14-32, Jesus heals a boy with an evil spirit. It is a baffling event. Neverthe­less, we learn what grieves Jesus most, and what Jesus wants us to have most.

I. The root problem is unbelief (14-19)

**First,** unbelief of Jesus' disciples and the teachers of the law (14-18). Jesus and his three top disciples--Peter, James and John--came down from the Transfiguration Mount to the foot of the mountain, the place of rendezvous, to join the other nine disciples who were waiting for them at the foot of the mount. The holy quietness Jesus and the other disciples had on the mount was dis­turbed by a commotion. A large crowd of people were watching an argument be­tween the nine disci­ples and some teachers of the law (14,15). The argument started when the nine disciples could not heal a boy with an evil spirit with their experience, which they had had during the time of the evangelistic journey (Lk 9:10; Lk 10:17). The teach­ers of the law teased the nine dis­ciples, mimicking the pose and gestures by which they had tried to drive out the evil spirit from the boy but could not. The teachers of the law must have said, "No way: You are country comedians." The crowd of peo­ple were hap­py to see Jesus in the hope that he would heal the boy possessed by the evil spirit. More than that, they were happy to see Jesus because he looked as glorious as God right after coming down from the Mount of Transfigu­ration. Look at verse 16. "'What are you arguing with them about?' he asked." Yet his disciples were only looking at each other, and no one dared to answer him. But 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" (17,18). The boy with an evil spirit was suffer­ing be­yond mea­sure. But the nine disciples could not heal him. The teach­ers of the law could not heal him, either. They could not heal him be­cause they had no faith in God.

**Second,** "O, unbelieving generation..." (19). What did Jesus say to him? Jesus did not answer him directly, but lament­ed in verse 19, saying, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me." "O unbelieving generation," said Jesus to the people of the times, the people born and living at that time, includ­ing his nine disciples. The general atmo­sphere of those times was filled with unbelief. The people of that generation were godless and they were all men and women of unbelief. As a re­sult, they became very fearful and fatalistic. The boy who was in con­stant torment was the exact description of the times. The hypocrisy of the teachers of the law was the symbol of the unbe­lieving generation. The teachers of the law were the lead­ers of the people. But they were only plagued by fear and insecurity because of their unbelief. They had no room in their hearts for God's sheep under their care. The nine disci­ples who had tried to heal the boy with an evil spirit had no faith in God to ask God's mercy to heal the boy with an evil spirit. Their faith was in their heads, not in their hearts. The nine disciples were in the realm of the unbelieving genera­tion.

In verse 19, Jesus said, "O unbelieving generation." When Jesus said this, it was a moment when Jesus was most painful. What did Jesus mean when he said, "O unbelieving generation"? It means that the whole world is in an unbelieving atmosphere or under unbelieving circumstances. For example, in the past there were several Bible-be­liev­ing universities around the world. They had once been called the cult of Jesuit society because they were Bible-believing people. These days these kinds of universities allow homosexual and lesbian groups, Hin­du and Mus­lim groups, Bahai and Buddhism to affiliate with the uni­versity as official groups. But university authorities, who are a xerox copy of the modern Phari­sees, reject Bible-believing Christian groups for affilia­tion with the university, simply because they are terribly afraid of un­godly high profiles in the unbe­lieving generation. Because of this phe­nome­non, many unbe­liev­­ing groups have been active to make the university atmosphere all the more unbeliev­ing. Jesus grieves most when he sees the unbeliev­ing gen­era­tion of the present time. Jesus grieves, saying, "O unbelieving genera­tion, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?" (19)

**Third,** the boy was a victim of the unbelief of the times. The boy in this passage seems to be a teenager. His life should have been beau­tiful, poetic, and a little rebellious to build up his own humanity. But it was not. He was only doing many things to destroy himself at any time (22), not because he was bad, but because of demon posses­sion.

How did Jesus see this boy's problem? To Jesus, the boy's real problem was the unbelief of that generation. Because all people of the times did not believe in God, Satan was in command in that genera­tion. Unbelief permeated all the ranks of intellectuality, all strata of soci­ety and all the echelons of culture. Unbelief smeared into the hearts of all people, even into the heart of a teenage boy, and made them all very sick spiritu­ally. Originally, man is a symbol of power and wisdom after the image of God. But unbelief made men very evil and fearful. Original­ly, women are the symbol of purity and faithfulness. But unbelief made them terribly inse­cure and immoral. The generation was in a spiritual quandary. People of the times were mental derelicts and flotsam of unbelief. Because of unbe­lief, the outcry of evil spirits and stompings of the devil were most vocifer­ous. In this unbelieving situa­tion, people were perish­ing under the power of sin and death. Life without God seems to offer man unlimited hu­man free­dom. But it does not. Innumer­able people from other coun­tries have a dream to come to America and fulfill the American dream. They are greatly mis­taken. These days TV most frequently broadcasts so many events of murder day after day. Someone said, "I have never heard any­thing that gives me a beam of hope on the TV." This might be the most adequate description of "unbe­lieving gen­eration." When we believe in God Jesus is our Fa­ther and helps us to sing, "Our Father who art in heaven...." If we do not believe in God the devil is our step­father who only gives us mashed pota­toes and makes us endlessly sorrow­ful. This is the reason Jesus griev­ed over the unbelieving generation in which teens are lia­ble to be possessed by the evil spirit. We cannot say that this genera­tion is a Bible-believing generation. This genera­tion seems to be one of the unbelieving generations. In this unbeliev­ing generation, one per­son's Bible-believing faith is more significant than any other thing in the world.

II. Jesus heals the boy with an evil spirit (20-27)

**First,** Jesus first heals the father's unbelief (20-24). In this situation, what did Jesus do? It was the very time for Jesus to pay close at­ten­tion to the boy. But he did not. Instead, Jesus paid attention to the boy's father. Jesus began to heal the father's unbelief first. It is impor­tant for us to think about why Jesus heals the father's unbelief first. As soon as the boy was brought to Jesus, the evil spirit real­ized that it was in dan­ger of losing the boy. So, as a last resort, it threw the boy into a con­vulsion. Then the boy fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth (20). Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he ans­wered (21). The boy's fa­ther ex­plained how terrible the boy's life had been; he often attempt­ed to kill himself (22). When the father asked the disciples to heal him, they could not. The boy's father had enough reasons not to believe, but to fall into unbelief. This is the father's problem as well as the prob­lem of unbelieving people. Unbelieving people have enough rea­sons not to believe. This is the crucial mistake of ungodly men. Faith must over­come sinful human reason. There is a saying, "He is just like his father." Likewise, the boy with an evil spirit lived like his father and became just like his father. He became a demon-possessed young man. He was under the power of sin and death. Now the boy was dying. His father said to Jesus in verse 22b, "If you can do any­thing, take pity on us and help us." He had no faith that Jesus would heal the boy. The father had half faith. Half faith is not faith at all. Look at verse 23a. "'"If you can"?' said Jesus." Jesus re­buked him for begging human pity and sympathy. The father was the last person who could have faith in God. But Jesus decided to plant faith in God in him by saying, "Every­thing is pos­si­ble for him who believes" (23). Here we learn that fa­thers and mothers should be Bible-believing people so they may give their children a spiritual heritage, not demon pos­ses­sion.

**Second,** the boy's father repented his sin of unbelief (24). How did the boy's father respond? When Jesus said to him, "Every­thing is possible for him who believes," immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (24b). This man sincerely re­pented his unbelief, crying out, "Help me over­come my unbelief!" From the father we learn how to overcome our unbelief. One summer, a ser­vant of God gnash­ed his teeth until he got a toothache and a sting­ing migraine head­ache in order to bear with his sheep's misconduct. In the course of living in this world we confront from time to time unbear­able trial. Most people do their best to solve their critical problems and finally fall into fatalism and unbelief. But we must come to Jesus. Then Jesus will say to us, "Every­thing is possible for him who be­lieves." This is the true way of repentance.

**Third,** next Jesus heals the boy (23). The boy's con­di­tion was critical, and no one could heal him from demon pos­ses­sion, so the father was fearful and sorrowful to watch his sick son. What did Jesus do? Look at verses 25-27. "When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuk­ed the evil spirit. 'You deaf and mute spirit,' he said, 'I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.' 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." In this way, Je­sus healed the boy with an evil spirit.

The evil spirit in the boy pre­tended to be mute and deaf. So it should not have been able to listen when Je­sus rebuked it. But it could hear what Jesus said and took imme­diate action. The evil spirit, Satan's agent, is a liar and murderer. John 8:44 says, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." In the spiritual world there are two kinds of spirits. One is the Holy Spirit, the other the evil spirit.

III. Prayer is the potent weapon for Christians (28-32)

**First,** the power of prayer (28-29). After this, Jesus went into a house. His disciples came and asked him a private question. "Why weren't we able to cast the demon out?" Evidently, the disciples were humiliated by the teach­ers of the law when they were not able to cast an evil spirit out of the boy be­fore them. Moreover, they were amazed by Jesus' power and authority over the evil spirit. His disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"

Jesus answered them, "This kind can come out only by prayer" (29). Jesus says here that they could not drive the evil spirit out of the boy be­cause they did not pray. What, then, is prayer? Prayer is the expression of our faith. 1 John 5:14,15 says, "This is the confidence we have in ap­proach­ing God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him." As much as we believe in God Almighty, we can pray. The third and fourth century Christians be­liev­ed that the corrupted Chris­tian church­es would be destroyed to­gether with the corrupted Roman Empire. But St. Augustine believed that Christian churches would prosper as long as there were Bible-believ­ing Chris­tians. Bible-believing Christians scat­tered and estab­lished Bible houses. The ancient Bible houses were call­ed the Augus­tinian mon­astery, the Franciscan monastery, the Domini­can monastery and so on. They prayed in the early morning from 5:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. They ate one meal a day and worked all day long. At night they taught ­the Bible. In this way, the Christian churches were maintained.

**Second,** Jesus teaches his disciples concerning his death and resurrec­tion (30-32). Look at verse 31b. "He said to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.'" After Jesus healed the boy, he took his disci­ples to a secret place. There, he began to teach them again the meaning of his death and resurrection.

In this passage we learn that we must not fight with broth­ers and sis­ters, but engage in the spiritual battle against the unbelief in our hearts.