

Mark 9:14-29 ESV

Are You Faithfully Tapping into God's Power through Prayer?

Sunday, Sept. 13 at 8:00 & 10:45 + Monday, Sept. 14 at 7 PM
 16th Sunday after Pentecost / 15th Sunday after Trinity – 2015

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ: Since, *by God's grace*, we trust in Jesus as our Savior, we are very blessed:

- ⇒ We *know* we will be welcomed into heaven!
- ⇒ We have a direct line to God the Father thru prayer!

But are we taking advantage of our blessings?

- ⇒ Whenever we sin, *are we sure of God's forgiveness?*
- ⇒ Whenever we have needs, *are we praying?*

In this sermon, a mute and deaf spirit needs to be cast out. *The disciples try, but fail.* Why did they fail; why do we sometimes fail? Let's listen for God's answer!

1. **The Setting:** ¹⁴ **And when they** [*Jesus, Peter, James, and John*] **came to the disciples** [*the rest of the twelve*], **they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes** [*the public teachers of the people*] **arguing with them.** ¹⁵ **And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him** [*Jesus*], **were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him.** // Jesus, Peter, James, and John had gone up on a high mountain where Jesus was transfigured (9:1-9). While they were gone, the other disciples had an opportunity to cast out a mute and deaf spirit. They tried, *but failed*, which led to an argument with the scribes. Then, *when Jesus arrived*, the whole crowd turned its attention to Him!

2. **The Inability of the Disciples:** ¹⁶ And he asked them [*His other disciples*], “**What are you arguing about with them** [*those scribes*]?” 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 [*overtakes*] him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid [*lit. dried up – as a healthy branch bends, so a dead branch dries and becomes rigid*]. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.” 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.” // So there was a battle of evil versus good; the evil spirit, *for the most part*, had his way with the boy. He made him mute and, from time-to-time, he seized him and threw him down. So the father brought his son to Jesus’ disciples, *but they were unable to cast out the evil spirit*. Then Jesus told us what went wrong when He called them “*faithless*.” The problem was **not** the strength of the evil spirit, **but** *their distance from God. Their ways had become mechanical – without thinking, without looking to God for the needed power*. We can also become mechanical – ♦we can attend out of habit, *forgetting about our need for God’s blessings*; ♦we can sing, *without thinking*; ♦we can say the words of the Lord’s Prayer, *without praying!* God let them fail—to get *their attention* and *our attention!*
3. **The Uncertainty of the Father:** ²⁰ And they brought the boy to him [*Jesus*]. 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.”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!” // So the evil spirit was powerful, casting the boy into fire to burn him and into water to drown him, yet God did not permit the evil spirit to destroy him. God is always in control, even when things seem out of control! Then the father: He believed Jesus *might* be able to do something, but he wasn’t sure. *Belief* and *unbelief* were battling in his heart, *as they battle in our hearts!* So Jesus encouraged him: “All things are possible for one who believes.” Then the father cried out: “I believe; help my unbelief!” ➡ Do we doubt God’s promise to provide our needs? ➡ Are we unsure about our entrance into heaven? ➡ Do we doubt God’s ability to use us to bless others? Whenever we doubt God’s promises, let us pray: “I believe; help my unbelief!”

4. **The Power of God and Prayer:** Here the battle continues: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.”**²⁶ **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.” // So in round 1 the evil spirit easily won over the humans—*the disciples who did not pray*. Then, *here*, after Jesus gave the command to depart, *the evil spirit seemed to win again* – as most thought the boy was dead, *but Jesus lifted the boy up to reveal His victory!* The forces of evil are powerful, but JESUS, *God in human flesh*, is MORE POWERFUL! So the battle was over, *but the disciples were confused*, so Jesus told them: “This kind [of evil spirit] cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”

Conclusion: Spurgeon, a famous 19th Century preacher, said it this way: “If we are to do the Lord's work, and to do it successfully, we must have faith in him, we must look beyond ourselves, ...we must look beyond our personal qualifications, we must look beyond our former successes, we must look for a present anointing by the Holy Spirit, and by faith we must hang upon the living God from day to day.”¹

We have all had our failures, *yet we are longing for success*. So what should we do? God is calling us to **STOP** being mechanical and trusting in ourselves; then **START** proceeding with ♦feeling, ♦truth, and ♦God’s power through prayer!

Here at Bethlehem we provide at least two opportunities every week to gather and pray with others about ♦our needs, ♦the needs of others, and ♦the many requests on our Faith in Action sheet and in My Daily Prayer Guide. If you will join me in becoming more serious about prayer, say, “Amen!”

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¹ <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/2454.htm>