

Help My Unbelief!

Mark 9:14—29

Introduction

This is an unusual narrative for Mark. It's not odd that he includes it in his Gospel, but the way he tells it. Mark's Gospel is a fast-paced, action-packed Gospel with very little description for the most part. The longest part is the Passion narrative. In fact, Mark's Gospel has been called a "Passion narrative with a prelude." Today's narrative is sixteen verse long. Compare that with his version of the temptation of Jesus. He relates it in two verses, while Matthew uses eleven to describe it and Luke takes thirteen. Evidently, Mark saw the details as being important here, so, let's dig into them.

The Main Teaching

Before we get into the details, we must remember to examine them in the context of the main teaching. And that is faith. (Read **Mark 6:5—6**) Where there is no faith, there is little divine action. Every detail in this account must go through that filter.

The Set-up: The Transfiguration

The first thing we see is the phrase, *and when they came to the disciples* (**Mark 9:14**). Jesus, Peter, James, and John are coming down from the mountain where He was transfigured. The "disciples" are the rest of the Twelve. Jesus and the Three are all coming down from this literal mountain top experience and are hit in the face with the real world. That's usually what happens. And it rocks your faith, which you think has been built up and made strong.

Arguing

I'm reminded of Moses coming down Mount Sinai (read **Exodus 32:17—20**). Of course, the scenes they're coming down to are different, but they are the same in that they show a lack of faith.

The Problem

And that's the problem. For the people, the problem is that the disciples weren't able to drive out a demon that had been plaguing a boy for years. But Jesus hit the nail on the head: "*O faithless Generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring Him to Me*" (**Mark 9:19**). Identifying the problem, He also identified the solution – himself.

The Solution

“All things are possible for one who believes” (Mark 9:23). If we just have faith in Jesus, that is enough.

Wavering Faith

But how much faith do we need? The father had gone through a lot. He had suffered along with his boy all those years. That had chipped away at his faith until there was very little left. He wanted to believe, but how could he? Have you ever found yourself there? Listen to the Formula of Concord: *Worthiness does not depend on the greatness or smallness, the weakness or strength of faith. Instead, it depends on Christ’s merit, which the distressed father [Mark 9:24] enjoyed as well as Abraham, Paul, and others who have a joyful and strong faith (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Art. VII, The Holy Supper, 71).* The writers of the **Formula** are talking about the Lord’s Supper. We must receive the body and blood of Jesus by faith. Our faith may be weak, but that doesn’t matter. If we have faith *the size of a mustard seed (Matthew 17:20)*, according to Jesus, we can do anything.

The Prayer of Faith

That verse about mustard seed faith appears in Matthew’s account of this event. This helps inform what Jesus said here in Mark that this kind of demon can only be driven out by prayer. What’s needed is the prayer of faith (read **James 5:14–15**). The next time we are confronted with something that seems too big, let’s pray the prayer of faith, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
