

Meet Jesus: As a father discovers how to pray

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[0 : 00] Amen. So if you'd like to open your Bibles, we're in Mark chapter 9. Mark chapter 9 and starting to read at verse 14. It's on page 844.

Mark chapter 9 from verse 14. And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them and scribes arguing with them.

And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them, what are you arguing about with them? And someone from the crowd answered him, Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute.

And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able. 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. And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth.

[1 : 13] And Jesus asked the father, how long has this been happening to him? And he said, from childhood. 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. And Jesus said to him, if you can, all things are possible for the one who believes. Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, I believe, help my unbelief.

And when Jesus saw that the 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.

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. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up and he arose.

And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could we not cast it out? And he said to them, this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.

[2 : 24] Good. Well, it looks quite straightforward on the face of it, doesn't it, friends? Really? This fascinating incident. It seems that there's a demonic influence in this son.

And that's causing something like epileptic seizures. Cause and effect. It seems quite straightforward on the face of it. I was having tea with a little girl a couple of weeks ago.

And after about five minutes, she said, I'm bored with eating. And Mark's conscious that we could get bored with his account of Jesus.

He knows that we're not all academics. He knows that we're not all experts in the intricacies of the Old Testament law. So it's only 16 chapters.

And it's a rollercoaster ride with Jesus Christ, the Son of God. There's no birth narrative up front. A strange truncated ending in chapter 16.

[3 : 26] It's fast moving. And Mark has us hooked to the phenomenon as Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as he strolls through the first century Roman Empire.

And only those 16 chapters. You see, well, ink was scarce back in the first century. And papyrus was at a premium.

And think about this. There was no word processors. So Mark had to sort of carefully formulate every sentence in his thinking before it sort of flowed through and through his quill.

Onto the papyrus. Do you see? You could say Mark was canny. Frugal even. I wonder if he wore a kilt. So we ask him, why, Mark, did you include this incident?

You know, we've already had both the casting out of demons and the healing of a whole hospital waiting list of patients. You know, why labour the point, Mark?

[4 : 27] And this little girl's about to give him her verdict. And Mark says, hang on a minute. This passage isn't a solo. It's an instrument in an orchestra that's playing a concerto.

And so we need to dig a bit deeper, don't we, friends? First of all, where are we in Mark's Gospel? Where does this passage find us in Mark's Gospel?

And the answer is we're in the second half of Mark's Gospel. You remember in the first half, Peter identifies Jesus Christ as the Son of God. He says, you are the Christ.

And he recognised what Mark has been teaching us right through the first half of Mark's Gospel. And then chapter 8, verse 31.

Just look at that. Chapter 8, verse 31. Mark says, and he began. And we say, Mark, what are you talking about? Didn't he begin in chapter 1, verse 1?

[5 : 26] But this is the second half. And we're learning about why Jesus came and what it would mean to follow him. Verse 31. This is why Jesus came. He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.

And our passage finds itself in this second half of Mark's Gospel, in which we're sort of looking ahead, A, to the reason Jesus came, and B, to what it would mean to follow him.

Are you with me? Is it making sense? I hope it is. So let's zoom in a little bit more now. Peter, James and John. They've been up on this mountain, haven't they, with Jesus when he was transfigured before him.

And then they sort of scramble back down and into this verse 14, the passage before us. And think about this. It's like the nine disciples that were left behind, it's like they've had a bit of a dry run.

You know, what it's like without Jesus. And our question is, how did they cope? Mark's readers want to know how these nine coped when the other three were up the mountain with Jesus.

[6 : 42] I guess it could be a little bit like when you've been away from the office on holiday. Has this ever happened to you? You left clear instructions, but then there was some sort of incident, and it wasn't handled properly.

And there's confusion, and disagreement, and turmoil. And this is verse 14. This is verse 14 as the disciples, the three disciples with Jesus, come back down from the mountain.

There's been this incident, and it's not been dealt with properly. There's turmoil. Even the religious weights and measures department are there. Let's just look at the scene in verse 14.

And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them and scribes arguing with them. And then it's a debrief. It's a debrief. What went wrong?

Verse 28. And when Jesus had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, why could we not cast it out? Why could we not cast it out?

[7 : 44] To put that another way, why couldn't we manage without you, Jesus? And Mark must have thought that this was a great moment to capture, to write it down and send it off to us, send it through the ages, to help all Christians manage until Jesus returns.

And we've got two points. The first point is that the disciples forgot to pray. And our second point is that the Father burst into prayer.

So first of all, the disciples forgot to pray. And you'll see they didn't pray there in verse 29. Jesus said to them, And this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.

And I want to ask a basic question. What is prayer? What is prayer, friends? And prayer is basically a response to our dependence upon God.

Whether it's giving thanks, or it's asking him to sort of intervene in this life. You know, we're asking him something that we feel is in accordance with his will.

[8 : 49] You know, for example, asking for forgiveness would be such a prayer. Or it might be words of adoration. The Lord's prayer begins with that, doesn't it? Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

But the disciples hadn't been praying. They must have thought that they could manage without God's help. Adam thought he could operate independently, didn't he?

Way back in Genesis chapter 3, the devil says, Don't believe God. And Adam thought, Hmm, that sounds a good way to live on planet Earth. You know.

He thought he could live independently. He thought he didn't need God's wisdom. And you and I, friends, we know that pattern only too well, don't we? It's why our city, why our country, why the world is in such a state.

But think about this. Just because we block God out, listen, it doesn't mean that we're not owned by him anymore. Do you see? As a child, you've perhaps had times when you'd sort of ignore your mum and dad.

[10 : 00] Did you ever do that as a child? But they're still your mum and dad, aren't they? Ignore them or not, they're still your mum and dad. And all humans are owned by God.

I don't know whether or not you've ever thought this through. But we can't escape being dependent upon him. Jesus says in Matthew chapter 5, listen to this, he makes the sunrise on the evil and on the good.

That is the totality of humanity. You know, we don't just need him for special occasions, we need him for our whole life, to sustain this creation.

A Muslim is dependent on Jesus for the air that he breathes. A Hindu is dependent upon Jesus for the wood that he fashions his idols from.

And friends, your work colleagues are dependent upon Jesus, yet they all try to ignore him. And the disciples, well, they've been reverting back to the old pattern. And so do you, friend, when you sin.

[11 : 02] And so do I. We try to manage without God, without his wisdom. So humanity tends to strut around on God's planet. We think that we can operate independently.

And the nine disciples, back to our passage, have slipped back into this pattern, haven't they? They thought they were on a roll. You know, they thought it was all about them and not Jesus.

They thought they were standing in for him rather than serving him. Just imagine the scene. Must have been quite embarrassing for them, actually, when you think about it.

The billing was miracle workers, and it all sort of fizzled out. It's like a car salesman, when the car doesn't start. He looks confident, doesn't he, when he sits in the driving seat to show you, but he turns the key, wow, wow, wow, and it stops.

We all know it's not going to start. And everyone knows this, don't they? The scribes are looking on, the dads looking puzzled, the crowd are holding their breath, and someone had to say it.

[12 : 07] They had to put words into the void, so the scribes, they close in, don't they? Like a board of professional standards. You shouldn't be doing this. This isn't of God, they say to these nine disciples, and they're right, aren't they?

They're right. Think of how Jesus felt, when he grappled with what had happened here, in verse 14. As the dad said to him, I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they weren't able, verse 18.

Your disciples, Jesus, they belong to you, they're yours. Three years Jesus had training them, didn't they? As a child, I once had to go with my dad, to the police station, to be cautioned, by a police officer.

I'd received, a stolen toy car, in the playground, and think of how my dad felt, you know, in that police station. It's your son. Think how Jesus, feels here.

You know, we carry his name, don't we friends, if we're Christians, and we revert back to the ways, of Adam. We operate on his planet, without considering him.

[13 : 23] Little or no prayer, we seek our will, and not his. Genesis chapter 6, and the Lord was sorry, that he had made man on earth, and it grieved him, to his heart.

And then look friends, at verse 19, it's a shocking verse. It's like the shock of Jesus, turning over the tables, in the temple. Words that reach us today, to confront our pride.

Mark sends them to us. Look what Jesus says, Oh, faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Could stop there, but it doesn't, does it?

Look, bring him, to me, says Jesus. And we move, from the independence, of the nine, to the dependence, of this father here, this dad.

Our second point, why the father, burst into prayer. So, poor dad, he's been from pillar to post, hasn't he? Hope's built up, and then dashed, and life's like that.

[14 : 25] Am I right? Is that how life is? We can go from one thing, to another, but never find, what we're looking for. And often, Jesus brings us, to a point, where we realise, that we're dependent, on more than ourselves.

It's as if, the scales tip, and we turn to him. And this man, brings his son. If we were to give him, a microphone, this man, he'd say, in Christ alone, my hope is found.

I love listening, to Mendelssohn's Elijah, it's an oratorio, follows the ministry, of Elijah. And there's this mum, her son is dead. She's pleading, she's lambasting, poor old prophet Elijah, about her son.

And then Elijah says, give him, give me thy son. And I've often burst into tears, at that point, because I know, what he's going to do.

He's going to pray, to the Lord. And the Lord, is going to give life, to the dead. And Jesus says here, bring him, to me. And one son, receives another.

[15 : 37] And the dad's eyes, light up, and there's hope, isn't there? It's as if Mark, is saying to us, this lunchtime, that out of the confusion, of our lives, we can turn to Jesus, and there is hope.

Verse 22, if you can do anything, have compassion on us, and help us. And here he is, a human being, who realises, he's dependent, on God.

It's a wee prayer, isn't it? It's a wee prayer. It's like, it's like your journey, with Jesus, friends. Look how it develops, verse 23, and 24.

And Jesus said to him, if I can, all things are possible, for one who believes. Immediately, the father of the child, cried out and said, I believe, help my unbelief.

And in his book, on prayer, a Norwegian, called, Ollie Hallisby, says this. He says, and though, there be much doubt, and but little faith, in our hearts, we can do as the father did, who came to Jesus.

[16 : 43] We can begin, by telling him, about our doubts, and our weak faith. This makes it easier for us, and we can pray, more confidently. We need not, exert ourselves, and try to force ourselves, to believe, or try to, chase doubt, out of our hearts.

Both are just as useless. It begins to dawn on us, that we can bring, everything to Jesus, no matter how difficult it is. And we need not, be frightened away, by our doubts, or our weak faith.

But only tell Jesus, how weak our faith is. We have let Jesus, into our hearts, and he will fulfill, our hearts desire. And friends, though faith, is weak, the one that we speak to, isn't, is he?

Do you see? Just look there, at verse 27. It's a wonderful verse. In fact, look at the last three words, of verse 26. Do you see the last three words, of verse 26?

Can you see the verdict, of the people? He is dead. And it's the world, isn't it, into which Jesus walked. A dead world.

[17 : 56] Verse 27, but, great word, Jesus, this is, in the Greek, this is the language, of the resurrection. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up, and he arose.

What a lovely moment. Being awakened, by Jesus. King David said this, and in God's house, forevermore, my dwelling place, shall be.

And this father, he's found that link, hasn't he? And there was an empty tomb, and another father, got his son back. Last month, I was with, a vicar down in London, and we were chatting, and, he told me about this couple, in the church, and they very much, kept themselves, to themselves.

And one day, the wife, was seriously ill. She was gravely ill, and she was in hospital. So my friend, the vicar, went to the hospital, to visit the wife, and, he took with him, the husband, and, he was sat next to the bed.

The wife was, gravely ill. She was in a coma, unconscious. And the husband, had wandered off, at one point. He was walking around, the hospital, stretching his legs. And suddenly, the wife's eyes opened, and the vicar looked, and he had a few words with her.

[19 : 15] She was conscious. And then the vicar, went off, quickly, to try and find the husband. And he found him, in the hospital, brought him straight back, to the bed. The husband, stood at the side of the bed, and he clasped, his wife's face, in his hands.

And he was talking to her. And they were talking, to each other. Just husband and wife, in this busy hospital. Each holding, the other's attention. Each cherishing, every word.

And then suddenly, my friend realized, he realized, that they weren't speaking, to each other, but to God. Yes, they were praying. They were praying, friends, together.

The disciples didn't. But friends, we ought. Shall we do that now? Father, this man, he said, I believe, help my unbelief.

And this lunchtime, that is our prayer as well. Each one of us, here this lunchtime, Father, we want to say to you, I believe, help my unbelief.

[20 : 29] And we pray, Father, through this prayer, that you'd help us to bring things to you, to bring our whole lives to you, and to pray as we ought, as citizens of your kingdom.

And we lift this prayer to you in Christ's name. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with each one of us this day, and forevermore.

Amen.